

Revisionismo histórico e impacto económico en las falsificaciones. Una propuesta inicial.

Historical revisionism and its economic impact on forgeries. An initial proposal

Adrià Harillo Pla

Investigador independiente, España

adria.harillo@gmail.com

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Resumen

Este artículo teórico plantea como hipótesis inicial la existencia de correlaciones entre el revisionismo histórico y el impacto económico sobre las falsificaciones de arte. Luego de afirmar que las falsificaciones tienen la intención de engañar y que su propia existencia se debe a los valores positivos asociados a ellas, aclaramos que el revisionismo histórico tiene un impacto en la cultura material, su exhibición e intercambio. Sostenemos que esto parte de la asunción de que el arte y las falsificaciones de arte son un ejemplo de cultura material. Sin embargo, describimos el mercado del arte como un mercado con problemas de información, el cual carece de incentivos para categorizar públicamente una obra como falsificada. Por lo tanto, concluimos que el revisionismo histórico puede tener un impacto en la producción de falsificaciones, pero su intercambio y exhibición sigue una dinámica igual a la de la obra original.

Palabras clave: artefactos culturales, cultura material, falsificaciones de arte, mercado del arte, revisionismo histórico.

Abstract

The initial hypothesis of this theoretical article is that correlations exist between historical revisionism and economic impact on art forgeries. After stating that forgeries have the intention to deceive and their existence is due to the positive values associated with them, we clarify that historical revisionism has an impact on material culture, its display, and its exchange. We state that artworks and art forgeries are examples of material culture.

Nevertheless, we describe the art market as one with problems of information and a lack of incentives to publicly categorize something as a forgery. Therefore, we conclude that historical revisionism can have an impact on the production of forgeries, but its exchange and display follow an equal dynamic to its original.

Keywords: art forgeries, art market, cultural artifacts, historical revisionism, material culture

Research Design

This article examines the existing correlations, if any, between historical revisionism and its economic impact on art forgeries. Our initial hypothesis is that the correlation exists, and the method used to support or reject this initial hypothesis is systematic bibliographical research, valid argumentation, and a logically sound conclusion.

However, some limitations must be considered. One of them is the limited amount of public data regarding forgeries. The data available is not fully representative of the total number of forgeries worldwide. Aware of this fact, we will use case studies that are already categorized as forgeries or the estimations provided by authorities on the subject as our framework when discussing forgeries.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the differences between cultures and subcultures. This plays a role in art practices and their market institutionalization, depending on the economic context or cultural values (Bjørnskov, 2021; Wang & Leung, 2010).

Historical revisionism can also vary depending on moral values or political context, and certain contexts can have fewer technical or general resources than others to identify a forgery. Consequently, the hypothesis of this article can be understood as a generalization, but its applicability may differ among specific contexts. This bibliographic article is an initial contribution to this topic and might be further developed in the future using disciplines such as, but not limited to, statistics, or empirical case studies.

To proceed, the structure and logic of this article will be presented using a pyramid principle, where our hypothesis is expected to be supported by three arguments, each bolstered by its respective premises and data. However, to avoid semantic disputes originating from the complexity of the terms or multidisciplinary frameworks, it is beneficial to clarify the key terms used.

Figure 1 *Argumentative pyramid principle for this study.*

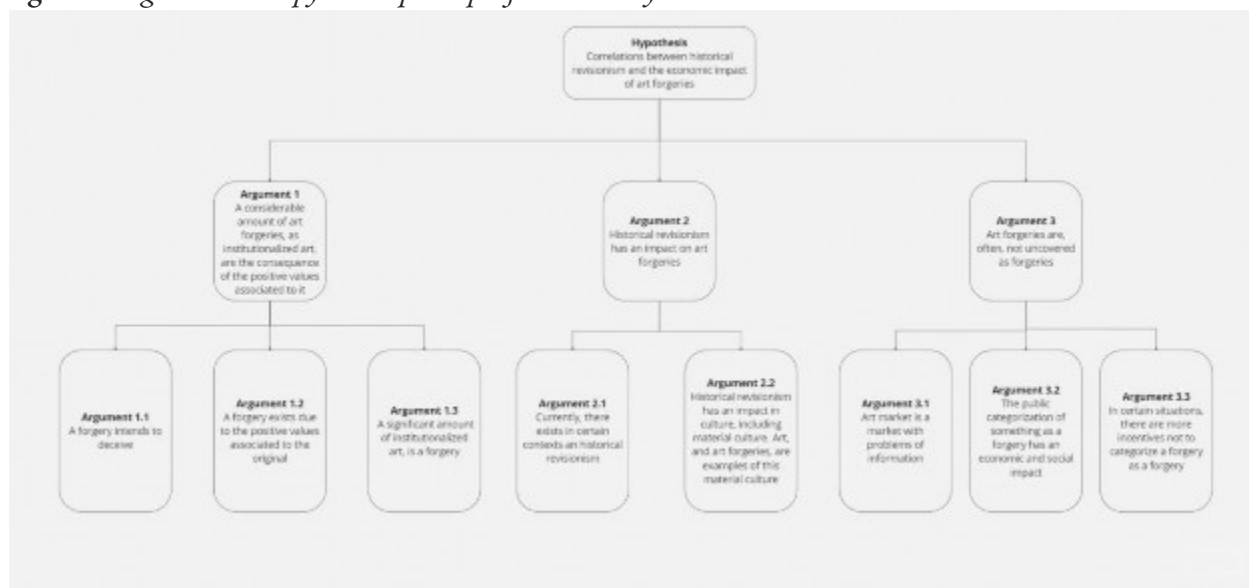


Figure 1
Argumentative pyramid principle for this study.

Terminology

To research the correlations between historical revisionism and its economic impact on art forgeries, we use a sociological definition of art rather than an essentialist one. Thus, we consider art to be an institution-dependent entity; that is to say, it is not a natural or intrinsic category, but a socially constructed one shaped by the art world (Becker, 2008; Dickie, 1974, 1984). We view art world as a social system with agents,

mechanisms, and motivations that collectively determine what constitutes art (Goodman, 1978). In this social system, creating entities with traditional aesthetic categories such as beauty, ugly, or grotesque is not necessarily the main motivation or the mechanism to define its hierarchical position (Danto, 1964).

Within this context, we consider the art market as a permeable subgroup within the art world, in which its agents, mechanisms, and motivations are related to the monetization of art. By art copies, we will refer to artworks that have been made to be exactly like an original one, while by art forgeries we will understand an art copy with the intention to deceive (Friedländer, 1941b, 1941a).

When using the term “society”, we understand it as a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done (Cambridge University, 2023). It is our understanding that within society culture can be found, not in its elitist way, but as an aggregation of attitudes, behaviors, and opinions of a particular group of people, which can be materialized on some occasions. This materialization of culture can take the form of art, among others (Grassby, 2005; Woodward, 2007).

Another key term in this article is “expectations”. Sociologically understood, expectations are used as a socially constructed belief or anticipation regarding future events, outcomes, or behaviors. They represent shared beliefs within a particular social context about what is likely to happen or what is considered desirable or appropriate. As such, they are performative (Van Lente, 2012, 2021).

To conclude, two more concepts must be clarified: “historical revisionism” and “values”. By historical revisionism, we mean historical reinterpretation or reevaluation, challenging established narratives or traditional interpretations (Krasner, 2019). This is made from present viewpoints or perspectives, and it is not positive, nor negative by itself. On the other hand, we understand that values are a set of normative principles and evaluative criteria that guide individual and collective behavior. They reflect the moral values, beliefs, and norms of a given society or community and are shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional factors.

Table 1 Overview of key concepts used in this article	
Art	Institution-dependent entity within the art world, not necessarily linked to classical esthetic categories.
Art World	Social system with agents, mechanisms, and motivations that collectively determine what constitutes art.
Art Market	Permeable subgroup of the art world in which agents, mechanisms, and motivations are related to the monetization of art.
Art Copies	An artwork that has been made to be exactly like the original one.
Art Forgeries	An art copy with the intention to deceive.

Table 1
Overview of key concepts used in this article

Art forgeries and positive values[argument 1.1] There are different ways to approach the topic of **forgeries**. Nevertheless, a forgery seems to be clearly linked to the intention of deceiving another party. It is, therefore, a matter of intellectual property and has potential legal implications. (Șerbănoiu, 2012)At the same time, this one seems to be its main difference from a copy.

Forgeries are as old as time, but the difference between a forgery and a copy can be seen not only in the legal distinction among them but also in current institutionalized practices. (Jones et al., 1990) One example is appropriationism, such as the one of Andy Warhol with the Brillo Box, just to put a well-known example. (Ashley & Plesch, 2002; Danto, 1964; Schneider, 2003; Welchman, 2003) In fact, some museums also

authorize individuals to create copies or replicas of artworks within the museum's collection for educational or conservation purposes, among others. While replication and practice is one well-known way of learning and improving, the called "*copistas*" from the Spanish Prado Museum are also an example of the second type, since the museum registers the copies. (García Vega, 2023) It is also worth noting that, in the past, the main painters had, as well, a team of people working for them in their workshops. There, their category depended on their skill to copy its master. (Ferino, 1979; Shiner, 2001; Tietze, 1939).

A forgery and, nevertheless, is different since it attempts to violate intellectual property and is based on deception. By deceiving, there should be "*an agent [who] acts or speaks to induce a false belief in a target or victim*". (Hyman, 1989, p. 133) Unfortunately, many distinctions between a copy and a forgery end here. Nevertheless, going one step further and asking "why?" brings at least one answer: because those forged artworks are associated with positive values.

[**argument 1.2**] There are different reasons for producing a forgery. One of them is to obtain a financial gain from it. To obtain a financial gain, the original must have a demand, and therefore must be associated with certain positive characteristics that make it valuable. In the art market, one of these categories is, for example, authorship. (Angelini *et al.*, 2023; Oosterlinck & Radermecker, 2019; A.-S. V. Radermecker, 2020; A.-S. V. E. Radermecker, 2019) Precisely because of this, authorship is often categorized in a hierarchy of author, attributed to [Artist's Name], school of [Artist's Name], circle of [Artist's Name], after [Artist's Name], studio of [Artist's Name], attributed to [Artist's Name], manner of [Artist's Name], and not categorized. The same applies to the topic displayed or the format used.

While atheist motives were not seen as positive in medieval Europe, photography was not considered a reputed method. (Klamer, 2003, 2016; Merryman, 1992) Therefore, no forgery was worth it to be produced, since the risks, in comparison with the potential financial gain, if any, was not incentive enough.

Another reason to create a forgery is reputation. If a forger can successfully pass off its forgeries as original artworks within the art world, without being detected, this could lead to a feeling of self-enhancement. (Trope, 1986) In this case, the positive values associated with the original are also necessary, since the reputation and self-enhancement derived from it needs the approval of the institutionalized art world or the positively valued skills of the author. Eric Herborn, Han van Meeren, and Wolfgang Beltracchi are some examples of this category. (Keats, 2013; Kimball, 1987) We include in this category those forgers who also produce their forgeries to challenge the establishment. (Lowenthal, 1992). [**argument 1.3**] **The combination of positive values associated with the originals and the intention to deceive of the forgeries are two conditions of necessity that lead to a situation where a significant amount of institutionalized art is a forgery.** (Lenain, 2012) Obviously, this is a complex statement with problems of information. Nevertheless, this is the conclusion of certain reports provided by authorized parties. One example is Switzerland's Fine Art Expert Institute (FAEI), which stated that over 50% of art is fake. (Artnet News, 2014) Xiao Ping, the former authentication adviser to the Nanjing Museum, elevated this estimation to 80% in certain situations. (Barboza *et al.*, 2013) This is, in part, a consequence of the high costs of hiring an expert, accessing certain documentation, or using techniques such as x-rays, infrared scans, or radiocarbon dating. Due to this fact, the most considerable number of forgeries can be found not at the high end of the market.

Historical revisionism and its impact on art forgeries

[**argument 2.1**] To approach the impact of historical revisionism in art forgeries, we must initially admit the existence of such revisionism. At the same time, it is important to admit that historical revisionism is not present in all contexts with the same strength or in the same direction. Nevertheless, it seems that in western cultures, historical revisionism is occurring toward colonialism, the societal role of women, and sexual and gender topics. Some examples can help to represent this reality. While the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code currently prohibit discrimination based on gender identity or expression, in countries such as Iran, imprisonment, fines, and even the death penalty are common, (Fisher, 2013; House of Commons,

2017; Saner, 2013). While the United Kingdom removed images of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol, other countries celebrated their national day by matching it with the discovery of their new empire. (Cork, 2018; Thomas, 2015; Wall, 2020). Also, while in some countries, nowadays, the role of women is legally equal to that of men, in other countries, they cannot drive a car alone. (REF) (Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, 2020) This revisionism has an impact in art as well, being one of the most current examples, the modification of Degas popular Russian dancers, for Ukrainians. (Quinn, 2022)

[**argument 2.2**] The examples of Edward Colston representations, or the Russian dancers from Degas, are examples of how physical artifacts, objects, and structures that are created, used, or preserved by a culture can be affected by historical revisionism. Impacting how material culture is represented, displayed, or preserved. This can occur via the reevaluation of statues, monuments, and memorials erected to honor historical figures. If a revisionist interpretation challenges the traditional narrative associated with a particular figure, there may be debates and discussions about the appropriateness of honoring them through public monuments. This can lead to calls for the removal, relocation, or recontextualization of such statues to align with the revised understanding of history. The process of revisiting and altering material representations of historical figures reflects the changing values and perspectives within a society.

At the same time, museums play a vital role in preserving and presenting material culture. Historical revisionism can influence the content and narratives of museum exhibits. As new historical perspectives emerge, museums may rethink their displays to incorporate alternative viewpoints and challenge existing narratives. This involves, as well, changes in conservation and preservation practices, both within and outside museums. (ICC, 2021).

Almost axiomatically, it can be stated that art is a type of material culture, and therefore, the forgeries derived from it are also. If we accept the fact that historical revisionism influences material culture, including art, it seems reasonable, using a reasoning by analogy, that art forgeries are also impacted by historical revisionism. The reasoning by analogy is based on the fact that the modification in the values associated with the original can affect the production, display, and exchange of the fake ones, since they are a copy of the first with the intent to deceive.

Art forgeries are often not uncovered as forgeries

Although it seems reasonable to claim that historical revisionism has an impact on art forgeries, this topic deserves deeper attention. This is because, in general, art forgeries are covered as forgeries.

[**argument 3.1**] A cause is that the art market is a market with problems of information. Like any other market, the art market operates on the exchange of information between buyers and sellers. However, it is plagued by significant information asymmetry. (Frey & Pommerehne, 1989; Goetzmann, 1995; Velthuis, 2005) The seller commonly holds higher knowledge about factors such as origin, demand, or conservation than potential buyers, reliant on the seller's assertions and expertise as a guarantee. (Nastasijevic, 2014; Velthuis, 2005) In fact, in the art market, there exists a primary market and a secondary market. The primary art market refers to the initial sale of artworks directly from the artist or their representative gallery or dealer to a collector or buyer. It involves the sale of artworks that have not been previously owned or sold by another party, which maximizes the problems of information regarding price assignment. The secondary art market, on the other hand, involves the resale of artworks that have already been purchased in the primary market. Transactions where artworks change ownership between collectors, dealers, auction houses, or other intermediaries. In this case, often, the problems of information affect mainly its authenticity, conservation, and origin. (Levine, 2008). **These** asymmetries can be maximized depending on the public or private nature of the sale and the legal responsibility of the agents involved in the production, display, or exchange. (Amineddoleh, 2016; Angelini & Castellani, 2022).

[**argument 3.2**] Another important factor to be considered is that, often, aside from the initial asymmetry of information, the art market does not often see art forgeries recognized as such. This is due to the fact that an art forgery being discovered is only positive for the expert who categorizes it as such. (Ginsburgh *et al.*, 2019).

Nevertheless, the categorization of an art forgery as such usually has a negative impact, both financial and cultural (Angelini & Castellani, 2019; Day, 2014).

Public identification of an artwork as a forgery, for example, can significantly damage the reputation and credibility of art dealers, auction houses, and galleries involved in selling or exhibiting the counterfeit piece. Buyers may become hesitant to purchase art, leading to a decline in sales and potential financial losses for the art market. At the same time, art forgeries often diminish the value of genuine artworks attributed to the same artist or period. The revelation of a forgery can cast doubt on the authenticity of other works, causing prices to drop and affecting the overall market value of an artist's work.

Investor confidence is another of the factors involved, which has a cultural and financial impact. Forgeries can erode confidence among art investors and collectors, deterring them from making substantial investments in the art market. This can limit capital inflow and negatively impact the market's growth and stability.

Taking this into consideration, if the institution holding a forgery and its sellers have no interest incentive in publicly categorizing something as an art forgery, this leads us to the question of who has mainly interest in it.

[**argument 3.3**] As already indicated, buyers, sellers, and agents implied in the art market often do not have enough incentives to categorize something as a forgery. From the seller's perspective, recognizing something as a forgery could reduce the value of the owned piece, and a cultural negative impact, for not having noticed it in advance, or for trying to introduce a forgery in the market being aware of it. (Marchenko *et al.*, 2021) For the middle-man, such as the dealer, gallery, or auction house, recognizing something as a forgery might involve less volume of works to be sold. For the buyer, buying a forgery could be less stimulating and socially rewarding. Precisely due to this lack of incentives, a significant number of forgeries are still uncovered. (Angelini *et al.*, 2022; Day, 2014) Therefore, it seems reasonable that art forgeries are only partially affected by historical revisionism. A logical approach tends to show that the main impact is generated in its creation, since the forgers tend to produce pieces that align with the values considered as positive nowadays.

This is in contraposition to producing forgeries from pieces that are not associated with positive values, and therefore, could be less financially rewarding. Nevertheless, regarding its display, or exchange of older uncovered forgeries, the impact appears to be equal to the one from the original artworks, precisely due to that lack of incentives.

Conclusion The initial hypothesis of this article has been that there exist correlations between historical revisionism and the economic impact on art forgeries. After stating that forgeries have the intention to deceive and exist due to the positive values associated with it, we clarified that historical revisionism has an impact on material culture, its display, and its exchange. We stated that art and art forgeries are examples of material culture. Nevertheless, we described the art market as one with problems of information and a lack of incentives to publicly categorize something as a forgery. Therefore, we concluded that historical revisionism can have an impact on the production of forgeries, but its exchange and display follow an equal dynamic to its original.

As previously stated, this article is a theoretical one, and empirical and statistical studies are needed to confirm if this initial statement is confirmed and replicated via data. Nevertheless, even for those performing data fabrication, the particular informational nature of forgeries and its financial and cultural implications might be a limiting point.

Acknowledging this fact, empirical and statistical studies seem to be the natural next step of this article. Nevertheless, further theoretical discussions can also be of high value to improve the conceptual base for this topic.

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Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Colombia
calle14.ud@udistrital.edu.co

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