

36 Views

by Naomi Iizuka

Study and Discussion Guide



Essays and Dramaturgy by Ashley Schweitzer
Edited by Amy Rummenie and John Heimbuch

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Notes from the Director, John Heimbuch

Naomi Iizuka's *36 Views* first came to my attention when it was published in February 2002. I read the play while on an acting tour on the east coast and was captivated by its portrayal of the lush world of high-priced art collectors, and its unique blend of Japanese and American theatrical forms. Iizuka's writing was unlike anything I'd read before – experimental but unpretentious, not quite Asian, not quite Western, neither realistic nor artificial. It was conscious of its own theatricality with a text where each word, action and thought echoed several layers deep. I immediately wanted to direct it, but was confounded by its deep reliance on visual imagery. I also wished I could write as she did.

After four years work with Walking Shadow, a growing artistic career and an uncomfortably large amount of what might be called 'life experience', my amazement with *36 Views* hasn't diminished, but it has changed. Where I once found myself drawn to the rich visual lexicon Iizuka uses, when I re-read the script last year what I found was a theatrical sleight-of-hand - an elegant story about identity, uncertainty and loss hiding (as its characters do) behind its many artistic trappings.

It's been an amazing process to bring *36 Views* to the stage. Through the contributions and hard work of our talented artists, we've found many meanings, resonances, questions and ideas that live within this text. Some of these we've unveiled, others await discovery. I hope you enjoy them both. Thanks.

A Short Biography of Playwright Naomi Iizuka

Naomi Iizuka was born in Tokyo and raised in Japan, Indonesia, Holland, and Washington, D.C. Her work has been produced and developed throughout the United States. She has lived most recently in Iowa and California. Naomi is the recipient of a Whiting Award, a McKnight Fellowship, an NEA/TCG Artist-in-Residence Fellowship, Princeton's Hodder Fellowship, a Jerome Fellowship, and a PEN Center USA West Award for Drama. She graduated from National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., and received a B.A. from Yale University and an M.F.A. from the University of California-San Diego.

36 Views was originally produced by The Public Theatre-New York Shakespeare Festival, George C. Wolfe, Producer and Berkeley Repertory Company, Tony Taccone, Artistic Director and Susan Mendak, Managing Director. *36 Views* was commissioned by A.S.K. Theatre Projects in Los Angeles. The play was written under the auspices of Princeton University's Hodder Fellowship and workshopped at the McCarter Theatre, A.S.K. Theatre Project's Common Ground Festival, the Public Theatre-New York Shakespeare Festival's New Works Now, Sundance Theatre Lab and Breadloaf.

A Brief Summary of *36 Views*

At an art show, a legendary art dealer and a rising star of East Asian Studies strike up a conversation. A prized possession is discovered to be fake. A deal to smuggle a national treasure out of its country of origin is made. A manuscript that could radically alter the academic landscape is discovered. Personal reputations are made and shattered. Questions of authenticity and value abound as themes of ambition, love, and revenge play out against a backdrop of academia and art.

Characters

Darius Wheeler	a legendary dealer of Asian art and antiquities
Setsuko Hearn	an assistant professor of East Asian Studies
John Bell	Darius Wheeler's assistant
Claire Tsong	a restorer of Asian artifacts and a mixed media artist
Elizabeth Newman Orr	a free agent
Owen Mathiassen	the chair of the East Asian Studies Department

On Orientalism:

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. . . .

By Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent. The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient -- and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist -- either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she says or does is Orientalism. . . .

...[A] very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on.

**Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books. 1979. 1-3.5

Hokusai and Ukiyo-e Painting

Hokusai – (1760-1849) Japanese master artist and printmaker of the ukiyo-e school. He claimed in his autobiography that “Although I had produced numerous designs before my fiftieth year, none of my works done before my seventieth is really worth counting,” a jest that hints at his commitment to excellence and innovation. Hokusai constantly reinvented and one-upped himself, revisiting the same themes and subjects throughout his long career. He is also known for using Western ideas and techniques in his works, but found ways to “balance between Japanese tradition and Western influence, which makes his prints appealing to Western eyes and yet seem very Japanese at the same time.” Hokusai’s oeuvre contains an array of subjects and materials, but he is best known for his print series “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji,” which was published from 1826-1833.



This groundbreaking series is a microcosm of his entire career – it was innovative, he revisited an earlier subject, and it balanced Japanese and Western ideas. “Never before had such a series large-format prints been planned in the field of landscape prints...At this date landscape only appeared in prints as a setting for actors or fashionable women; landscape was restricted to a few isolated prints and did not count as a genre in its own right.” “Thirty-Six Views” was also notable because the original prints were issued exclusively in Prussian blue, a Western pigment new to Japan, it was “expensive and rare.” Although it may have “an obvious Western bias” at the time, these works inspired several other contemporary artists

and helped establish what are now considered to be characteristics of Japanese landscapes. (Forrer, Matthi. *Hokusai* Munich: Prestel, 1991. 23-5)

Ukiyo-e (Japanese, “pictures of the floating world”) was a dominant school of art during the Tokugawa period from 1603–1867. The style draws on the realistic narrative seen *emaki* (“picture scrolls”) produced in the Kamakura period as well as the decorative style of the Momoyama and Tokugawa periods. Although screen paintings were the first works to be done in the style, ukiyo-e became known for its woodblock prints. Common subjects included famous courtesans and prostitutes, kabuki actors and well-known scenes from kabuki plays, and erotica. In fact, the name ukiyo-e comes from a euphemism for the entertainment district – the floating world.

You can visit the Minneapolis Institute of Art’s [online collection](#) to see more of Hokusai’s works and an [online featured collection of ukiyo-e prints](#) of the Edo era. The Metropolitan Museum of Art also has online thematic essays on [ukiyo-e woodblocks](#) and [the art of the pleasure quarters](#).

Kabuki

“Kabuki developed strongly and flexibly by avidly taking in other entertainments and fashions while overcoming various difficulties in each period in its history of about 400 years...Kabuki as we have now inherited it is a ‘comprehensive art’ incorporating various elements of Japanese theatrical performances, dance and music.” (from [Public entertainment with wide maguchi \(range\), Invitation to Kabuki 2007](#))

History

The website [Invitation to Kabuki](#) is part of the Japan Art Council and the National Theater of Japan and gives a wonderful overview of the history, staging, and styles of Kabuki. Kabuki is a traditional form of Japanese public theater known for its use of dance, song, stylized acting, and spectacular staging techniques. The term comes from kabuku, meaning to be “eccentric or extraordinary or outstep the bounds of common sense.” (from [Public entertainment with wide maguchi \(range\), Invitation to Kabuki 2007](#)) It evolved from dances and skits performed in the cities’ pleasure districts and is the first popular form of theater in Japan. Around 1600 the dancer Okuni performed a new dance of the same name that imitated outlandish early Edo and was a great success. Many of the districts’ prostitutes imitated her and performed the dance and to advertise their business. As a result, the Japanese government banned women and young boys in 1629 and 1652, respectively. Kabuki has been highly popular since its development and has been performed continuously in Japan except for during and immediately following World War II. Its reemergence and recognition as a national cultural treasure is in part due to Faubion Bowers, who was General Douglas MacArthur’s translator and aide-de-camp during the American occupation of Japan. Bowers famously declared that “Kabuki is not only Japanese culture but world culture and must be preserved for the future” and he is widely credited with saving kabuki.

Characteristics

By the early 18th century many features that still characterize it were in place – adult male cast; unique styles of music, dance, and acting for different types of plays; and character categories (Yakugarai) and scene types. For example, in addition to makeup and costumes, different kinds of movement and expression indicate gender on the kabuki stage. Female roles (and the male actors who play them) are called Onnagata. Tachiyaku refers to male, traditionally heroic, roles and there is also a subset of villain roles, which are called Katakiryaku. Kabuki is a hereditary art form; fathers pass down their roles to their sons and adopted protégées: “Each generation of actors has been devoting their energy to bringing up strong successors who will inherit their art.” (from [Expression by actors, Invitation to Kabuki 2007](#)) Different acting styles have emerged from famous acting families. There are two main types of plays –

the historical play (*jidaimono*) and the domestic play (*sewamono*). A traditional day-long Kabuki program generally presents them in that order, with an intermezzo of one or two dance plays featuring ghosts, courtesans, and other exotic creatures. The finale is a dance piece (*ōgiri shosagoto*) with a large cast. Famous plays include *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (Treasury of Loyal Retainers), *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* (Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees), and *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami* (Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy).

Some examples of kabuki's characteristic and spectacular staging techniques are:

Hyōshigi (“rhythm wood”), also called *ki*, *tannuki*, and *tysuke*. The clappers are two wooden sticks about 10 inches long. They are hit together by *korogen* (see below) to indicate important moments in kabuki, such as the opening and closing of the curtain. The sound is a clear, high pitched clack.

Mie, a stylized pose an actor strikes and holds that expresses a moment of heightened emotion. It is often accompanied by the sound of wooden clappers. To see examples of *Mie*, visit Invitation to Kabuki's [Mie](#).

Bukkaeri, a quick costume change that used when a character reveals his true identity or when undergoes a remarkable transformation. Two costumes are held together by a basting thread. When it is pulled, the upper half of the costume falls to the actor's waist and other costume is revealed. Because the lining matches the top of the new costume and covers the lower half of the previous costume, it appears as if the entire costume has changed. Usually an actor stands in a *mie* pose to heighten the effect.

Hikinuki is a quick costume change usually used in dance plays to provide visual delight. The actor wears two kimonos that have been sewn together by a basting thread. Ten small button or knots are placed strategically at the end of each thread – one at each cuff, one underneath each sleeve opening, one at each sleeve bag, one at center back of the waist, and one at the collar. On cue, one or two *koken* (stage assistants) pulls the thread and removes the upper kimono. The timing is very important and the assistant's actions must be synchronized with the actor's dance. To see examples of either costume change, visit [Hikinuki](#) at Invitation to Kabuki. (from [Expression by actors, Invitation to Kabuki 2007](#))

Roppo, a highly stylized exit. The name means “six directions” and the exit is marked by the actor's exaggerated movements with his feet and arms, which give the impression that pointed in six directions – heaven, earth, north, south, east, and west. To see examples of a *roppo* exit, please visit [Roppo](#), from Invitation to Kabuki. The *kitsune* “(or fox) *roppo* is noted for curled hands for paws and other fox-like characteristics. Foxes are common in Japanese folklore and their most frequent attribute is the ability to take human form.

Kurogo – An assistant who helps the actor onstage by handing him props and making scene shifts and in general it means “someone who endeavors to help others without drawing attention to himself or herself.” The *kurogo* wears a black robe and gauze hood and the convention of this costume signifies to the audience that he is invisible.

Heian Culture, Writing and Sexual Politics

The Heian era (794–1185) is considered a Classical Golden Age of Japan. It is characterized by the flourishing culture of the court, including the female vernacular literature of Sei Shonagon and Murasaki Shikibu. The period takes its name for the capital city of Heian-kyo (present day Kyoto). Heian-kyo,

which means “Capital of Peace and Tranquility,” was established in 794 and remained the capital and the imperial seat, if not the source of political power, until 1868. Politics and government were dominated by the Fujiwara clan, who counseled and controlled the emperors. They exercised this control through a system of marriage politics – arranging for the emperors to marry Fujiwara daughters, encouraging the emperors to abdicate once a Fujiwara-heir had been produced, and then serving as regent. In 894 the Japanese government stopped its official communications with China, a break which allowed for the development of a native Japanese culture. The works of Shonagon and Murasaki depicted Heian court life and were very popular at the time, having a profound impact on later Japanese literature. Although excluded from public affairs and forbidden to learn Chinese (the official language of literature and court communications) women had a relatively secure position and achieved artistic success. The contrast between freedom and constraint, pleasure and its end, are recurring themes of the Heian era.

The literature and art of the period were rooted in both the complicated, deeply stylized world of the Heian court and aesthetic of *mono no aware* – a sadness of things, the fleeting nature of life and beauty:

The Heian period has two contrasting aspects that must be kept in mind if we are to understand the world...On one side is the love of color and grandeur, of pomp and circumstance ... Michinaga [a head of the Fujiwara clan] and the people of his circle loved splendor and display and did their best to infuse the yearly of celebrations with the beauty and elegance that were so important in almost every part of their lives.

Never far removed from this delight in the aesthetic joys of the world is the somber, negative aspect of the period, which is an underlying theme in almost all contemporary literature. Often it is just when some splendid celebration has drawn to an end...that Genji is most overcome with the gloomy side of reality and that the vanity of human pleasures strikes him with the most poignancy. The negative tenor of Buddhist doctrine—its picture of the world as a place of universal suffering—was an important element.

(Morris, Ivan. *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1964. 13)

The connection between the world’s beauty and its passing is when the sense of *mono no aware* is heightened. The two things that ensured a good reputation were the ability to experience *mono no aware* (Morris, 197) and negotiate the “subtle rules of aesthetic refinement” of the Heian court. (Smits, Gregory. [Chapter Three: The Heian Period Aristocrats](#))

Women of the Heian court had a rather favorable social position as a result, at least in part, of the system of marriage politics. Although they could not participate in government, they could inherit property and were protected from divorce and domestic abuse. They had servants to tend to their needs and had minimal duties as wives or mothers. (Morris, 206-7) In some ways they were remarkably free, though in others they were constrained by gender, rank, apparel, architecture, and social codes. In Heian society, marriage and sexuality were governed by a code of conduct based on class and etiquette. (Morris, 214-5) Generally women married at a young age or became part of an Empress or Imperial Consort’s retinue, in part because “it was firmly believed that any girl who remained a virgin for a long time had been possessed by an evil spirit.” (Morris, 213) Marriage politics were not exclusive to the Fujiwara’s. Heian men could take multiple wives and the marriage between a man and a principal wife was arranged by the parents for political and social advancement. Generally, a newly married woman would remain with her parents, rather than moving into her husband’s family home. Her husband would visit at night, or sometimes even move in entirely. Her husband became the head of the family upon his father’s retirement, at which point the principal wife would take up residence at his home. Her goal was to produce as many children as possible – to secure her position – and then raise any daughters to be advantageous brides to advance the family’s social position. (Morris, 218-220)

Social advancement was predicated on being able to follow the rules of etiquette and aesthetics. One of these rules involved the role of writing in the Heian court, composing letters and poems was a social act and obligation: “Upper-class Heian life was punctuated with poetry from beginning to end, and no important event was complete without it (Morris, 179) ... The composition, exchange, and quotation of poems was central to the daily life of the Heian aristocracy ... There were many occasions in daily life – a visit to the country, for example, or the site of the first snowfall of the year – when failure to compose poems was a grave social solecism.” (Morris, 177-8) Because etiquette was so important to social standing and reputation, upon receiving a poem, the recipient would craft a reply using the same images and send it right back. A witless or uninspired courtier was doomed, “a skillful verse was the best way to win a woman’s favor or, equally, to obtain a promotion.” (Morris, 179) But poetry alone was not enough, for calligraphy could both enhance or ruin the effect: “A fine hand was probably the single most important mark of a ‘good’ person, and it came close to being regarded as a moral virtue... a person’s handling of his brush was [considered] a better guide to his breeding, sensitivity, and character than what he actually said or wrote. In Heian times to have a poor hand was no less ruinous than to be bad at poetry.” (Morris, 183-4) Similarly, “A person’s skill in the art of correspondence could make or break his reputation.” (Morris, 187) In addition to the importance of a well wrought verse or letter, skill in calligraphy was equally vital: “[Heian aristocrats] regarded handwriting as the mirror of a person’s soul, they awaited the first letter from a potential lover or mistress with great trepidation. For indifferent calligraphy was bound to disqualify people, whatever other charms they might possess... Often it is a lady’s handwriting that first win’s a man’s affection, sometimes before he has even met her.” (Morris, 184-5) Servants carried letters and poems to and fro, and because the contents were not considered private, “they were often read by the wrong people and resulted in endless complications.” (Morris, 188)

Furniture and architecture caused other complications, in particular the *kicho*, which Waley translates as “screen of state”. It was a large portable frame from which were hung richly decorated silk tapestries. Its purported purpose was to protect women from male visitors; however, it was possible to pass objects below the screen. The poems and letters that play such a large role in Heian affairs could be exchanged in person, if desired, which could help protect the contents from prying eyes. The screen was an essential part of any courtship: “When receiving a gentleman caller, a woman normally ensconced herself behind these curtains, where, at best, she could be seen only in dim outline. A principal aim of the Heian gallant was to insinuate himself behind the screen of state; once he had achieved this preliminary objective, the rest usually followed with remarkable ease.” (Morris, 32) Interestingly, as with correspondence that could fall into inopportune hands, again privacy was meaningless: “No architecture was better suited to the eavesdropper or the Peeping Tom [that the interior of a Heian home]. The word *kaimairu* (literally, ‘peeping through the hedge’) recurs throughout contemporary literature, and many of the plots revolve around conversations that are overheard ... Certain apartments in the Imperial Palace were provided with ‘singing’ floorboards to give warning of eavesdroppers and other interlopers...[but for most] privacy would have been a meaningless term.” (Morris, 34-5)

The Heian court was preoccupied with the intrigue and affairs of its members. Heian aristocratic women, in particular, were devoted to following these pursuits. Many men and some women took many lovers: “Whether or not a man was married, it redounded his prestige to have as many affairs as possible; and the palaces and great mansions were full of ladies only to ready to accommodate him if approached in the proper style... Such relations entailed no obligation on either side... In practice neither partner was expected to remain faithful, though their poems often contained protestations to the contrary. Unattached women... many of [whom] had their own houses and, being economically independent, were free to have such relations as they wished and also to terminate them ... The reputation of carrying on several affairs did not, it is true, add to a lady’s prestige as it did a man’s, and women were careful to avoid exposure and the consequent gossip. The court ladies, however, were not particularly criticized for their promiscuity.” (Morris, 225-6) The love affairs were “conducted according an elegant ritual, with a strong

aesthetic sense of how things should be done...the endless poems, the 'next-morning letters', the choice of the correct shade of flowers and leaves, the application of the proper scent." (Morris, 228)

For all the interest in romantic and sexual relationships, and obsession with aesthetics, the human body was not considered appealing, it was "was never included in the contemporary cult of beauty." (Morris, 202) Murasaki even refers to it as "Unforgettably ugly...It really does not have the slightest charm." (Morris, 202) It may be that this disinterest, or aversion, to the human form, is tied to the awareness of its impermanence. Heian ladies covered themselves with elaborate layers of silk robes, which must be suited to one's rank, the season, and the occasion. The skill of balancing the colors and patterns in beautiful and pleasing manner was highly praised. (Morris, 204) The shining world of the Heian court, its elaborate rules of etiquette and aesthetics, its flourishing culture are one side. And an awareness of the impermanence of the cherry blossom, the flirtation, the achievements of this world on the other, and the frailty of the body are on the other.

Fakery and Forgers

"The art market is tricky, unorganized, and unregulated and in this market it pays very well for people to sell objects that aren't what they purport to be...The only thing that stands between the dealers and the collectors are some of the professors and curators who are willing to give opinions."

"Every few weeks I get a letter from somebody wanting my opinion about a piece. I ask people to sign a disclaimer saying that they've asked for an opinion, they realize it's just an opinion, and they promise not to sue me or Harvard as a result of it."

Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., curator of American art at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum and an expert on Martin Johnson Heade (Reed, Christopher. ["Wrong!" Harvard Magazine September-October 2004](#))

"When authenticating an art object, experts have provenance, technical analysis, and their connoisseurship to rely on. Provenance or purported provenance—the former whereabouts of an object—is often of little value, proving only that a thing was not made yesterday. A bad piece can have a good provenance, and documents attesting to who owned what when can be faked. Technical analysis can usefully probe the physical makeup of objects with x-ray, infrared, or ultraviolet examination, for instance, and detect all sorts of repairs and subsurface peculiarities. But Stebbins believes that technical analysis leads to definitive conclusions less often than not. The best way to judge right and wrong, he asserts, is 'educated, experienced, and very close looking'—connoisseurship." (Reed, Christopher)

"The eyeball is still king for Chinese painting connoisseurship," Joe Scheier-Dolberg, Boston Museum of Fine Arts research fellow (McQuaid, Kate. ["Studying this copycat collector has real value"](#) The Boston Globe 20 Jan. 2008)

"The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity." (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 220)

"The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history it has experienced...that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of art" (Benjamin, 221)

Notable Forgers

Elmyr de Hory (1906 – 1976) A famous Hungarian painter and art forger, he is considered by some to be the greatest art forger. According to John Pyle, who owns de Hory paintings, “People ask, ‘Is that a real de Hory? It’s not a Modigliani, but is it a real de Hory?’ Yeah. Look at the quality. Have you seen anything of that quality that wasn’t a Modigliani?” (Hamlin) He is particularly known for being able to mimic the works of the masters, such as Picasso, Matisse, Renoir, and Modigliani. His works were often mistaken for originals by the art community – they were purchased by collectors and reputable galleries and were featured in books of these masters’ works. De Hory was a talented artist, but he was also meticulous in using old canvasses, frames, and paper. He claimed to have sold over a thousand forgeries all over the world and, according to Armando Rascon, a gallery owner who has exhibited de Hory’s works “The [de Hory] scandal implicated the art establishment and raised questions about what constitutes expertise” (Hamlin).

De Hory detested having to sell his work to gallery owners and he developed a contentious, and sometimes lucrative, partnership with art dealer Fernand Legros, who also worked with other art forgers. Legros helped sell his paintings, established the forger in Ibiza, and paid him a monthly allowance. However, Legros also took increasingly large cuts of the profits and was inconsistent in actually making payments. As he grew older, de Hory’s work grew sloppy and remaining a step ahead of the law became a greater challenge. Eventually he had to flee Ibiza, but, in 1968 he seemed to give up the fight and returned to his adopted home. He was indicted by Spain on charges of "homosexuality and consorting with known criminals to 'no visible means of support,'" but not charged with forgery or fraud due to lack of evidence he painted on Spanish soil. He returned to Ibiza in 1969 as a celebrity who was celebrated for his unusual ability. He collaborated with the author Clifford Irving on a biography, *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*. He and Irving were both featured in Orson Welles’ 1974 free-form documentary, *F for Fake*. He was embarking on a new career as a legitimate artist in his own right. However, in 1976 when he discovered that France intended to extradite him on charges of fraud, he decided he could not return to jail and took his own life.

For more information on de Hory’s life, visit [the Crime Library](#). For information on the sale and impact of a de Hory Matisse at Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum, read [Christopher Reed’s article “Wrong!” in Harvard Magazine](#). For information on a 1999 de Hory exhibit at San Francisco’s Terrain Gallery, read [Jesse Hamlin’s article “Master \(Con\) Artist: Painting forger Elmyr de Hory’s copies are like the real thing” for the San Francisco Chronicle](#).

Clifford Irving (born November 5, 1930) An American writer who is probably best known for the "authorized" *Autobiography of Howard Hughes*, which turned out to be a hoax. In 1969, he wrote the biography of his neighbor, Elmyr de Hory, *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*. Both were featured in Orson Welles’ 1974 free-form documentary film, *F for Fake*.

In 1970, Irving and his friend Richard Suskind dreamed up a scheme to create a fake autobiography of the famous recluse, Howard Hughes, who had not been seen publically since 1958. He told his publisher, McGraw-Hill, that Hughes had contacted him and was willing to give phone interviews and tell his story. Irving and Suskind planned elaborate details, faking letters and legal documents with forged signatures to make it seem legitimate. McGraw-Hill commissioned Irving to write *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes* and paid Irving an advance of \$100,000, and \$765,000 for Hughes. Irving deposited the money in a Swiss bank account set up by his wife, Edith, under the name H. R. Hughes. He also arranged a deal with Time-Life magazine. Irving and Suskind meticulously researched Hughes life and staged fake interviews all over the globe. They used Hughes’ legendary paranoia and privacy to justify keeping all the details secret. Then, through a lucky coincidence, Irving was able to obtain a copy of an unpublished

manuscript on Hughes life that featured many previously secret details. James Phelan, Hughes right-hand man, had collaborated on the work. Irving made his own copy and used the details in this manuscript as the foundation for his own book.

In December 1971, Irving and Suskind handed over their book, as well as notes in “Hughes” handwriting to McGraw-Hill. Of course, Irving and Suskind ran the risk of being exposed by the real Hughes, but both assumed that, if he were even alive, he was too ill or disengaged to come forward. However, shortly after PR for the book began, so did the problems. Many of Hughes’ colleagues and associates doubted the book’s authenticity, saying he would never relinquish his fiercely guarded privacy. Then Frank McCulloch, a journalist for Time-Life who was the last to interview Hughes in 1958, received an unexpected call from someone claiming to be Howard Hughes. He said that Irving and the “autobiography” were fake and that he had no part in it. McCulloch told Time-Life and McGraw-Hill about the call, and contacted Irving about the claims. Irving countered that the phone call was a fake and the man an imposter. When McCulloch read the manuscript himself, it appeared genuine. Plans to publish the book went forward, but so did Howard Hughes. In January 1972, speaking publically for the first time in 14 years, Hughes arranged a conference call with reporters and denied being involved in any way. Irving reacted by holding a press conference and going on 60 Minutes and claiming, again, that this other Hughes was an imposter. But he had already lost his gamble, and Hughes filed suit against Irving, McGraw-Hill, and Time-Life. The Swiss police investigated the bank account of “H. R. Hughes” where the payments totaling \$765,000 had been deposited, and the police were able to tie the account to Irving and his wife. The copy of the Phelan manuscript was unearthed, and when the two documents were compared it was obvious that Irving had used the information. McCulloch discovered that Irving had lied about his whereabouts when “interviewing” Hughes; he was actually carrying in a series of affairs with women all over the world. On January 28th, the Irvings confessed to the elaborate scheme. Given the sensational details of the hoax and its discovery, it isn’t surprising that a media frenzy ensued.

The Irvings returned the money and Clifford Irving, Edith Irving, and Richard Suskind were indicted for fraud and all plead guilty. Irving was convicted and served 17 months. After his release, he resumed his original literary career. For information on his other books, visit his official website www.cliffordirving.com.

Clifford Irving’s own comments offer some interesting insight:

According to 60 Minutes: “Irving says that he and Hughes never communicated in any way, ‘except on some astral level. I convinced myself that I knew him intimately.’ ‘You wondered how I could lie so fluently to you,’ he says to Wallace. ‘That’s because at some level, I believed everything I was telling you. I believed we met. I believed the prune story. I believed I knew his life better than any biographer. Because I had imagined it.’ ([Liar, Liar: Clifford Irving Revisited](#), 60 Minutes)

From his website: “The media made a big fuss about this book back in 1972. I returned all the ill-gotten gains, but I was sent to federal prison for pulling the wool over the eyes of the establishment. Prison was an interesting experience. The hoax Autobiography creates a more exciting life for Howard Hughes than he had in what’s loosely called real life. If an author is allowed to say so, it’s a great read.” (www.cliffordirving.com)

Irving is critical of the 2006 film, *The Hoax*, directed by Lasse Hallström and starring Richard Gere: “I was hired by the producers as technical adviser to the movie, but after reading the final script I asked that my name be removed from the movie credits. I didn’t want anyone to believe that I had contributed to such a historically cockeyed story where the main character, almost by coincidence, happens to bear my name...The movie misses the point that the Howard Hughes hoax was a live-action adventure story concocted by two middle-aged hippie expat writers and a Swiss heiress...The movie is best thought of as a hoax.” ([The Movie](#), Clifford Irving)

Read Time Magazine's 1972 story, "[The Fabulous Hoax of Clifford Irving](#)". Check out the excerpts from Mike Wallace's two Clifford Irving interviews on 60 Minutes, [a 1972 interview only a few months before the hoax was revealed and a 2000 story update](#). Or you can read [the Crime Library's account](#).

Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) Also known as Chang Dai-chien. A painter who was one of the most celebrated Chinese artists of the 20th century, he was also an art collector and forger. His skill and success as a forger is such that, according to the MFA Boston, "The first question asked by experts when a work is considered suspect is: 'Could this be by Zhang Daqian?'" ([Zhang Daqian: Painter, Collector, Forger](#) Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Born into a wealthy family, he was uninterested in pursuing the family business and studied art in Shanghai under two famous painters and calligraphers Zeng Xi and Li Ruiqing. His apprenticeship included making meticulous copies of Chinese masterworks, a skill he later used to his advantage. He started out in the art world as a collector and amateur painter, but a reversal of his family fortunes led him to become a working artist. In 1949, after the Chinese Civil War, Zhang left the country and eventually settled in Brazil in 1954. He exhibited throughout the US and Europe, including an especially well received show in Paris in 1956 at the Musee d'Art Moderne. On this trip he met with Picasso, which was "given considerable attention in the press as a meeting of the masters of Western and Eastern art." He moved to California in 1967 and to Taiwan in 1976. ([Chang Dai-Chien Biography](#), Asian Arts)

Zhang is equally famous for his skill as a forger. This diverse collection spans more than 1,000 years of Chinese art. He is particularly notorious for his skill at forging a paper trail to authenticate his art: "He made counterfeit seals and used antique ones to establish fictional provenance. He mounted "Drinking and Singing" on a scroll made of patterned silks with gold and silver rollers that implied the painting had belonged to a wealthy 19th-century Japanese collector. He'd begin a forgery by consulting a 12th-century painting catalog of the Chinese imperial collection. Most of the works listed have not survived, and Zhang had an extensive knowledge of the works that did. He'd choose one that had vanished, paint a new version, and present it as a rediscovered masterpiece... Forensic science offers only limited help when it comes to identifying Zhang's forgeries. He used traditional materials; he had studied the dying and manufacture of textiles and knew how to make an old piece of silk look antique." (McQuaid, Kate)

Two famous suspected Zhang forgeries have been featured in museum exhibits in the last decade. "The Riverbank," from the collection of C.C. Wang, was part of a 1999 exhibit at the Met. Its authenticity was the subject of a vigorous debate in the art community, which was covered by both the New York Times and the Washington Post. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, currently has an exhibition on Zhang entitled "Zhang Daqian: Painter, Collector, Forger" that runs until September, 2008. Its centerpiece is a piece called "Drinking and singing at the foot of a precipitous mountain," purchased by the MFA in 1957. According to MFA research fellow, Joe Scheier-Dolberg, the museum "recorded it as a landmark acquisition. It would have been the anchor of our early Chinese landscape painting collection." After discovering their error, they put the painting in storage until the "statute of limitations on embarrassment" has passed. (McQuaid, Kate)

"Zhang was a collector, an authority, and a venerator of tradition who also upstaged it," says De-Nin Lee, an assistant professor of Chinese painting and Asian art history at Bowdoin College. "He was a theatrical person. He had a long white beard and a scholar's robe. Part of the performance was competing with or bettering the expert masters. It was a way to play and to trick his friends." (McQuaid, Kate)

To learn more about the MFA Boston's exhibit, please visit [the MFA's website](#). You can also read [a feature from the Boston Globe about the exhibit and Zhang's life](#). To learn more about the Met's exhibit, please visit [the Met's website](#). If you want to find out more about the controversy

surrounding “The Riverbank” you can check out [the City Review’s extensive coverage of “Chinagate”](#). You can also read these reviews of the exhibit from [the New York Times](#) and [Antiques and the Arts Online](#). To learn more about Zhang Daqian in California, read Dr. Mark Johnson’s essay, [“Chang Dai-chien: A California Reintroduction”](#).

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