

# Book review: Art: Authenticity, Restoration, Forgery. David A. Scott

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2016, Los Angeles: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 500 pps., ISBN 978-1-938770-08-1. Available from the publishers in soft cover print and as a Kindle eBook  
Book reviewed by Robyn Sloggett, The Grimwade Centre, The University of Melbourne

When asked to review David Scott's recent publication 'Art: Authenticity, Restoration, Forgery' I agreed; but with some trepidation. There is a regular and almost relentless release of new books on authenticity, art fraud and forgery fighting for space in bookstores and libraries. Generally, these publications are entertaining; but their approach can be lightweight, revelling in the titillating tropes of crime, glamour, failed expertise and big money, and failing to properly contextualise or critique associated philosophical and practical issues. As a result, they contribute little to our understanding of the complex issues of authenticity, attribution and fraud. David Scott's book, while replete with entertaining anecdotes and case studies, is not such a book. Comprehensive in its research, careful in its construction, this well-written volume brings together an extraordinary breadth of information with clarity and authority. It is both enjoyable and informative, and provides a substantial contribution to the field.

The author is well-known to the conservation profession. A conservation scientist with a special interest in metals, Professor David Scott is Distinguished Professor in the Department of Art History, UCLA, and the founding director of the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program. He has published on a wide range of topics, contributing around 140 peer-reviewed articles and eight books to the conservation. He has contributed a number of significant publications on historic and ancient metallurgy, the scientific analysis of cultural material, and pigment identification and use. His *Copper and Bronze in Art: Corrosion, Colorants, Conservation* was cited by the American Association of Publishers as the best Scholarly/Art book published in the United States in 2002. More recently his writings have focused on broader issues including issues in art restoration, art and authenticity, and the illicit trade in cultural property.

In this book, as the text on the back cover explains, ideas relating to authenticity are explored through 'the conservation perspective'. Taking this approach has enabled the author to engage in broad cross-disciplinary inquiry and explore different philosophical positions while maintaining a rigorous analytical approach. The ICOM-CC Definition of the Restorer-Conservator links the preservation of the authentic cultural record to professional impact (Section 3.1) as an embedded function in professional ethics and practice, and this volume locates questions relating to authenticity squarely within purview of conservators. In acknowledging this professional responsibility and the associated challenges, David Scott takes as a point of departure the issues that contemporary conservation practice must address: What is restoration? How does the concept of significance affect conservation decision-making? What is the relationship between materiality and authenticity? How do different ontologies affect conservation ethics? Having established conservation as the intellectual framework in which to

consider his enquiry the author then builds a considered and complex discussion of the interrelated issues of authenticity, restoration and forgery.

The book is extraordinarily well-researched and comprehensive. It contains a wealth of information that, as a result of the linear and chronological chapter progression, is easily accessible. From the introductory chapter on authenticity and conservation, a series of chapters deal with the history and philosophy of the authentic including the idea of the authentic in the development of international conventions and charters, and a substantive chapter on 'Different Approaches to Authenticity.' The text then explores 'The Ancient Old World', through Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque to Early Twentieth Century, to 'The Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary'. The final chapter closes the book with 'Some Final Thoughts and Reflections'. Within this structure, locating 'The Ethnographic and the Authentic' between 'The Ancient Old World' and 'Considerations of Medieval Authenticity' seems discordant. Rather, and indeed as the author demonstrates, it could be argued that issues of concern for many communities (which UNESCO describes as 'Indigenous' but preferenced as 'native' in this volume) have more in common with modern and post-modern debates, such as shared intellectual property, the role of the performative and oral in preserving the authentic cultural record, and nexus between materiality and the immaterial. This is particularly the case where such critical engagement is shifting museum ethics and practice, for example in debates on repatriation and degrees of community engagement.

David Scott's writing style is authoritative, accessible and clear. The structure is particularly conducive to ease of access to information with sets of key words at the beginning of each chapter, and a useful glossary at the end of the volume. While overall the book is clearly laid out and well-written the double column format means that a high percentage of words are split between lines. On the first page over a quarter of line endings required hyphenation, presenting a break in words, and disrupting the easy readability of the text.

It is gratifying that a book with this weight and substance, in a field that suffers no shortage of titles, is written by a conservator. David Scott demonstrates the important contribution that the discipline of conservation can make to broad complex topics such as authenticity and forgery. While this book will have wide appeal to the general public, it is particularly relevant for architects, archaeologists, art historians, collection managers, conservators, curators, philosophers and legal professionals. It is not only a welcome addition to the literature on authenticity, restoration and forgery, but also an important contribution to scholarship in this field.