

# The concept of “original” in Conservation Theory *Fake? The Art of Deception* revisited

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## Abstract

There are several blurry questions in contemporary Conservation Theory. Remarkable contributions from the past now seem insufficient and a stronger theoretical structure is required. Conservators and restorers rely blindly on concepts taken for granted; such is the example of “original” which is the basis of so many decisions and intervention methodologies. Do we really understand the meaning of “original” and why it is so important to our work? What consequences may derive from the misinterpretation of this concept?

This paper proposes an approach to the term “original”, seeking answers in a historic analysis, revisiting a remarkable publication by the British Museum, *Fake? The Art of Deception*, a catalogue from a 1951 exhibition re-published in 1990. In opposition to “original”, we aim to analyze the relationship Man has had with fakes, forgeries and copies over time and how they can be helpful when defining “original”.

## Keywords

Contemporary conservation theory, original, fakes, copies, forgeries, restoration.

## O conceito de “original” em Teoria da Conservação – *Fake? The Art of Deception* revisitado

### Resumo

Na Teoria contemporânea da Conservação existem múltiplas questões confusas. Aparte notáveis contributos passados, as premissas teóricas são ainda insuficientes e torna-se necessária a existência de uma estrutura teórica sólida. Conservadores e restauradores confiam cegamente em conceitos tomados como paradigmas; tal é o exemplo do conceito “original”, o qual é a base de várias decisões e metodologias de intervenção. Compreenderemos realmente o significado de “original” e porque é ele tão importante para o nosso trabalho? Quais são as consequências que derivam da incompreensão deste conceito?

O presente estudo propõe uma aproximação ao termo “original” pela análise histórica, revisitando uma publicação notável do British Museum, *Fake? The Art of Deception*, um catálogo publicado inicialmente em 1951 e republicado em 1990. Em oposição a “original”, pretendemos explorar a relação entre o espírito Humano e os falsos, falsificações e cópias, e de que forma pode contribuir para a definição de “original”.

## Palavras-chave

Teoria contemporânea da conservação, original, falsos, falsificações, cópias, restauro.

## **El concepto de "original" en Teoría de la Conservación - *Fake? The Art of Deception* "revisitado".**

### **Resumen**

En la Teoría Contemporánea de la Conservación hay muchas cuestiones pendientes. Aparte de las aportaciones del pasado, las premisas teóricas siguen siendo insuficientes y se hace necesario disponer de un sólido marco teórico. Los conservadores-restauradores dependen en gran medida de conceptos tomados como paradigmas; ejemplo de ello es el concepto de "original", que es la base de diversas decisiones y metodologías de intervención. ¿Entendemos realmente el significado de "original" y por qué es tan importante para nuestro trabajo? ¿Cuáles son las consecuencias de la incomprensión de este concepto? En este artículo se propone un acercamiento a la expresión "original" a través del análisis histórico, revisando una publicación extraordinaria del Museo Británico, *Fake? The Art of Deception* (Falso? El Arte del Engaño), un libro publicado por primera vez en 1951 y reeditado en 1990. A diferencia de los "originales", es nuestra intención explorar la relación entre el espíritu humano y los falsos, falsificaciones y copias, y como puede contribuir a la definición de "original".

### **Palabras clave**

Teoría contemporánea de la conservación, original, falso, falsificaciones, copias, restauración.

### **Introduction**

The development of the field called Conservation and Restoration has been neglected as an object of study *per se*. Although there are important contributions from remarkable authors such as Cesare Brandi, among other important names, conservation theory remains an open field for discussion given the lack of theoretical contributions in the contemporary scene. The need of a solid theoretical structure is directly linked to the recent epistemological origin of the field itself, as well as its diverse filiations (scientific, artistic and humanistic) implanted "officially" in the technologic and scientific premises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the previous paragraph it becomes clear that in order to analyze conservation theory we need certain tools, given many points of this field are still unclear. First of all we need to consider terminology from which this text will be built. Terminology is the basis of a scientific field and therefore of scientific speech. That being said we need to clarify this matter before anything else. Another question we can, and should, raise is how History can help us understanding the evolution of Conservation, which takes us to the fields of Art History, Science History and Mentality History. However, History is not enough given the fact that we also need Aesthetics to complement a History of Mentalities. These two fields of study allow us to understand the psychological profiles of societies over time, proving that every human action has a direct link to cultural factors that preexist in a

certain moment. This means there is no such thing as a neutral action. This should be something to remember first of all when we criticize past interventions, often called “incorrect interventions” or “damaging intervention which took place in the past”. An important thing to remember is that our present work, despite all scientific knowledge and technologic breakthroughs available, is not neutral, meaning we in turn are not detached from cultural factors that influence our decision making. This fact alone should lead us to long for a coherent theoretical structure which could, at least, improve objectivity. This is particularly true due to one important specificity of conservation work: every artistic or cultural work is unique, materially, historically and aesthetically speaking. This establishes a difference between western and eastern world’s history of mentalities: western society values a chronologic vision which defines the importance of the concept of “original”. In opposition eastern societies value the perpetuation of techniques and materials.

From all the facts we need to review in order to better understand where conservation stands at the present day, we need to realize that nothing really new has been said since Cesare Brandi and even this had been influenced by so many others, such as Pietro Edward’s practices as Director of the Restoration of the Public Pictures of Venice and the Rialto, back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Salvador Muñoz Viñas has brought up some important remarks in his work entitled *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, published in 2003. This author realized there were gaps between classical ethical principles and practical conservation, as he states during an interview for *E-Conservation Online*: *«I had been working in both practical conservation and teaching for some time, often trying to tackle ethical problems that arose when approaching conservation ethics in the classical way; that is by applying classical principles, such as, reversibility, objectivity, respect for truth, minimal intervention and the like. However I found that these classical principles could seldom be fully applied. In order for them to work, you had to not abide by them at some given moment. Sooner or later it was necessary to discard them to enable conservation to be reasonable and acceptable. For some years I tried to cope with this incongruity between theory and practice, between what should be and what could be.»* (Blackman, 2008).

Perhaps the first thing we should admit would be that Conservation History is very, very important, mainly because nothing is really that new and most of all, classical principles are not working as they should. The concept of “original” is really very old and still one of the classic ones in Conservation. And why is that true, we should wonder. Contemporary conservation theory should question its own foundations, what we take for granted, such as this simple and yet not fully understood concept of “original”. It is a very widespread concept which hasn’t had the same definition over time. Nowadays we consider as original several material traces, such as supports, patinas and varnishes, as well as everything else put together by the creator of the work. However during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when restorers such François-Toussaint Hacquin were famous for their work, supports were changed as a regular practice, for conservation purposes, although later on it became obvious that a wooden painting transferred over canvas would not look and behave exactly the same way.

Supports and pictorial layer share an organic symbiosis.

So what’s really new? Rather than questioning the value of “original” we prefer questioning what it means for sure and why is it so important for us, conservators in general. Most of all how “original” influences conservation and how “original” is influenced by contemporary conservation. Our solid point of support is the 1990 re-edition of a 1951 British Museum catalogue: *Fake? The Art of Deception* (Jones, 1990), although there could be so many references of publications dedicated to fakes and forgeries. This monograph is representative of museum collections all over the world that question “original” and that challenge conservators in anthropological and professional analyses.

### Understanding what “original” means

The concept of “original” seems easy to understand and it has been widely used specially in conservation field. The *Infopedia Dictionary of Portuguese Language* defines the word in two categories: uniform adjective «*referent to origin, primitive, which is not copied nor reproduced, unique, authentic, made in the origin, new, unedited, revealing creativity and innovation, out of the ordinary, eccentric, singular, peculiar to someone*» and as a noun «*work from the author himself, primitive writing from which copies are made, model, person who is portrayed*». Ana Calvo describes this word as «*Work made by an author in comparison to a copy, which is a repetition of the original made by another hand. In the case where the copy is made by the author it is called replica*». (Calvo, 2003:160).

Obviously, the concept of “original” has as great an importance in current language as it has in the conservation field. Culturally speaking we value works of art as symbolic objects, more than anything. Great works of art are worshiped and copied as they are looked upon as models, as singular, as primitive, as innovating, as authentic; fundamentally as unique and we dare to say, irreplaceable. These objects testify skills, craftsmanship and genius. They are symbols of what we, humankind, can do and what we hold dear.

Simply exploring the concept of “original” is not enough, as it is a dead-end street. We think that it is only possible to understand why originals are so important to us when compared with the relationship we hold with non-originals, with copies, replicas and ultimately, forgeries. That is why the British Museum so cleverly published a catalogue dedicated to fakes, in 1951. This catalogue was republished in 1990 and we now aim to revisit it as we have to admit that fakes also produce a fascinating effect on us and not only originals. Fakes also raise conservation issues we should be aware of. Obviously this effect has different justifications and perhaps there lies the true meaning of “original”.

### *Fake? The Art of Deception revisited*

First of all what are fakes and why are they made? As David M. Wilson says in the preface of the catalogue *Fake? The Art of Deception*, «*To many the main purpose of the forger is to*

earn money (...) But this is not entirely true – the wholesale forgery of English fivers by the Germans during the Second World War was undermining the British economy. Michelangelo’s forgery of a work by his master Domenico Ghirlandaio was a student prank; but the reason for his forgery of *Cupid Asleep*, which was sold in 1496 as a classical sculpture, may not have been so innocent». (Jones, 1990:9). There are apparently many reasons to explain why forgeries are made other than making profit: political and economic, humoristic, and even for ego reasons, just as great masters have done, such as the quoted example of Michelangelo. Fakes are not as innocent as we may think; rather than being inert objects to despise, they are less passive than we may believe. The most famous forgery case in the Renaissance was in fact the forgery of the *Cupid Asleep*. Michelangelo buried the sculpture in acidic earth to make it look very old and coherent with the classical period. This work was sold to Cardinal Raffaello Riario of San Giorgio, who discovered the fraud. Instead of being very angry he was very impressed with Michelangelo’s talent and overlooked his action. The sculpture continued its path as an antiquity and became property of d’Este’s collection in Mantua. It was displayed as a genuine article, among genuine antiquities. Finally we lose track of this sculpture in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (Boese, 2008).

The most interesting fact we can extract from this information is that if *Cupid Asleep* was found nowadays, it would be worth millions and looked upon as a master’s genuine work, a genuine forgery. This concept is enough to mess all the preexisting ideas we could have on “original”. How come a forgery can be considered genuine? This is the same as claiming “This is an original forgery from Michelangelo!” In this case the quality of original is implied in the master itself and not in the sculpture and therefore the work of art is not something independent from its author. It means we automatically value the author (an object’s ultimate origin) and not quite the work *per se*. This raises two other relevant questions: first of all, are there objects valued for themselves and does the author’s importance makes forging more appealing?

We believe both statements are true. Regarding the first question we can claim there are objects, cultural or artistic, that we value independently from their authorship. Perhaps the most ancient examples are prehistoric paintings. The Portuguese Foz do Côa prehistoric engravings can be presented as an example, but Lascaux paintings have an interesting characteristic when it comes to the concept of “original”. In January 1963 Max Sarradet made concerned observations in the grotto and its owner, the Comte de la Rochefoucauld-Montbel, closed the public visits. André Malraux who was Minister of Cultural Affairs at the time, had forbidden him to reopen the galleries because of the chemical and biological problems caused by constant visiting. For conservation reasons a second set of paintings were made and this facsimile was inaugurated in 1983 and receives today more than 280 000 visitors a year. That is 280 000 people who do not care if they are looking at “fakes”. This does not represent detachment from originals, instead represents a case study where conservation was more important than the originals. It is also valid for the Spanish example of Altamira where the same conservation solution was successfully adopted.

The second question we raised is perhaps more complex to answer. Mark Jones, the person responsible for the exhibition *Fake? The Art of Deception* said that «*the expert sees what he wants to see; he has tunnel vision*» (Jones, 1990:9). So, how do fakes prevail over experts and everything else given specific circumstances? And how do they turn out to fascinate us? We have to admit that we value cultural and artistic heritage for its meaning and its age, nevertheless contemporary art occupies a different part of our brains. If a work of art was made by Michelangelo himself we see the author's aura all around it. That is why we value not only the work, but everything else that made part of the author's life: his house, daily tools, a painter's brush, a writer's pen. The object's essence is not solely contained in material evidence. This is why forgery offers such a wide field to explore.

### History of “deception”

Forging and copying are very old activities. There is a common idea that forging art and antiques can only be possible in a society where old and symbolic objects can reach high prices. In fact forgeries as we understand them today were not the same in the past, especially in cultural contexts where old things were not valued. In past times an artistic object was valued for its own merit and nowadays we almost worship something attached to a particular name and therefore we can ask what is more important, the *Mona Lisa* or Leonardo da Vinci? Can we even answer this question?

It is known that even the most worshiped objects were replaced when damaged, and war periods were particularly delicate when it comes to saving originals. Many parts of objects and buildings have been transformed and replaced over time for matters of taste and necessity. In these cases is there real forgery? Most of all what is a forgery over historical analyses? Maybe we should start nowadays and then go back in time. Ana Calvo describes forgery as «*Imitation of an artistic work made with the intention of making it being accepted as original. A forgery does not only copy but it pretends to look exactly like the authentic and therefore it uses old supports, simulates surface cracks, damages and patinas, eluding detection even by experts*» (Calvo, 2003:99). In turn a facsimile is described by Ana Calvo as an «*Exact reproduction of a book or document made with an educational purpose, in order to enable the study of the original. It also can be defined as a perfect imitation or reproduction of a signature or drawing for its diffusion*» (Calvo, 2003:99). A copy is defined as a «*Reproduction of a work of art made by other than the author, contemporary or posterior comparing to the original.[meaning unclear] Copies may have great historic and documental interest when reproducing lost works, such as the majority of Greek sculptures, known today thanks to roman copies. Some copies may have artistic value in their own right*» (Calvo, 2003:66).

Whether they are fakes, copies or replicas, is the artistic and symbolic value detached from them and only possible for originals? It is a fact that some forgeries or fakes turned out to be valued as authentic, such as a medieval altarpiece which was originally bought because



of the value of the fake ivories on its structure and turned out to be valued for the original 13<sup>th</sup> century paintings on the outside (Jones, 1990:29). So a fake became an original over history! Copies are also an important part of Art History, as this activity «*has often been the dominant mode of artistic activity, motivated by a desire to maintain or renew traditional forms and skills. By nostalgia for the past and admiration for its achievements*» (Jones, 1990:29).

It becomes clear that the easiest way to identify a fake lays on intention – if a copy is made there is no intention of deceiving; this copy can even be very different from the original when it comes to dimensions and materials and it is clear that the original was only a source of inspiration. When a copy is made with the intention to deceive, it becomes an imitation and therefore, a fake.

Older than object forgery is documental forgery which dates back to Babylonia and can be traced till the propaganda warfare of the twentieth century (Jones, 1990:59). The reasons why documents are forged can be so many as economical, political, juridical, etc. [There can be many reasons for forging a document....] The *Old Babylonian forged inscription* is a cruciform monument from Sippar, southern Mesopotamia; experts believe it was forged probably during the Old Babylonian period (first half of the second millennium BC) and it pretends to have been created in the reign of Manishtudhu, King of Akkad, between 2276-2261 BC). This monument can be identified as a *fraus pia*, or "pious fraud", as it was probably created by the priests of the temple of Shamash in order to prove the «*great antiquity of the privileges and revenues of their temple (...)*» (Jones, 1990:60). Two Greek authors decided to offer posterity fake eye-witness accounts of *Dares of Phrygia* (a Trojan ally) and *Dictys of Crete* (a Greek ally), (Jones, 1990:61). There are also several examples of monkish forgeries, such as the *Forged Dectretals of Isidore*, which are documents produced in different periods of time and assembled in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to emphasize the Church's power (Jones, 1990:62). In opposition there is the example of the *Spanish Inquisition torture chair*, said to «*have been found in Cell 23 – a dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition at Cuenca in Spain. It was assembled from a number of separate elements, some genuine, in the nineteenth century for sale as an interesting antiquity*» (Jones, 1990:70). It pretended to be a genuine article from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it even has an inscription saying «*CABALLERO (probably the maker) ANO DE 1676 SANTO OFFICIO*» (Jones, 1990:70). This object is not only a forgery; it also symbolizes bad action made by the Church. Despite the horrible truth behind the Inquisition this object makes it worse by means of a false statement.

Apocryphal texts were also forged, as proves the *Letter of Christ to Abgar*. This text was extracted from the *Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius* (AD 260-340) where there are earliest Greek versions of two letters «*supposedly exchanged between Christ and Angar (4 BC – AD 50), King of Edessa*» (Jones, 1990:79).

Forgery became particularly relevant with collectionism which was very important from the

Renaissance on, although we cannot forget the strong demand for Greek sculpture that took place in Imperial Rome. However the really «*collecting mania occurred in Europe in the nineteenth century*» (Jones, 1990:119), and the basis of this demand was not the cult of the artist, the symbolic value of relics or the artistic value of objects, but their age. The 19<sup>th</sup> century cherished Time, and this is a legacy we hold dear today when defining "original" and when distinguishing "original" from non-original. When Cesare Brandi theorized about aesthetical and historic value he was clearly applying his cultural heritage and applied values which were particularly important in the previous century and are still our cultural heritage today.

Relics were objects forged particularly often during all times. It is also one multimillionaire business branch of forgery. The *Crown of Thorns* was supposedly acquired by Louis IX of France in 1239 for at least 135 000 *livres*. The authenticity of relics was an important matter and the ability to perform a miracle could distinguish between genuine and fake. There are several examples of relic forgery in which contemporary science had something to say: the *Turin Shroud*, made in the mid-fourteenth century, the *True Cross*, the relics of the apocryphal *Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne*, the milk of the *Blessed Virgin Mary* and most probably the early martyr St. Agnes (Jones, 1990:81). For believers Science is an intruder ready to shatter beliefs, but historically speaking these fake relics managed to improve faith and power over believers for centuries.

Magic and mythical objects were obvious sources of forgery according to our present vision, but they were very respected in the past for their fascinating and unexplainably features. Alchemical transformations have been reported widely, as proved in the following text, supposedly a description of a successful transmutation published by John and Andrew van Rymdyk in an early description of the British Museum's collection: «*It is said to be an imposition on a gentleman which happened thus: - This pretended Alchymist had two little Knives, one of which had a Gold Point, the other plain, and were made so as to resemble each other as much as possible. The time being fixed on, and the pretended Elixer produced before the Gentleman; the Imposer with legerdemain trick, changing the plain knife, after its dipping, deceived the Eyes by his nimble motion, and brought forth the other with the Gold Blade; then again the Great Elixer beings spilt on the ground, and again ... [It was] purchased by the late possessor, at a very considerable price*» (Jones, 1990:82). Other objects were very common: unicorn horns, griffin's claws, mermaids and mermen (which consisted of «*dried parts of monkeys, with fish tails, probably on wood cores*»), (Jones, 1990:85).

As an example of propaganda and counterfeiting in wartime we can present *The Lusitania Medal* from 1915; this medal was reproduced in large scale and was sold in Britain and in the United States during the First World War. The medals had a label in which could be read «*An exact replica of the medal which was designed in Germany and distributed to commemorate the sinking of the "Lusitania". This indicates the true feeling the Warlords*



*endeavour to stimulate and is proof positive that such crimes are not merely regarded favourably, but given every encouragement in the land of Kultur»* (Jones, 1990:74). In fact the author of the German medal, Karl Goetz, created it for satirical reasons and defended himself saying that the Lusitania carried arms and its passengers were warned in advance of the danger *«in advertisements placed in American newspapers»* (Jones, 1990:74). The truth was that the Germans had not planned the medal in advance and Goetz's satirical work was immediately suppressed by the German government.

### Recent deceptions

There are some more recent examples of deception which are worth to explore. Innocent or conscientious deceptions are miles apart. Without a single doubt the art business is the most profiting of them all. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century forgers were particularly busy during World War II. Nazi leader wanted to steal famous paintings from their opponents and from Jewish families. Hermann Goering was the head in chief of this operation and he owned a great private collection. His greed was also deceived when he went to Holland where he expected to find an original from Vermeer. It turned out to be an original from Hans Van Meegeren, *Mary-Magdalene washing the feet of Christ*. Van Meegeren was a forger who managed to deceive even the greatest Vermeer expert, Bredius, who claimed the painting to be authentic. At the end of the war truth came out and Van Meegeren shocked everyone by admitting he was the author of such art pieces and that he had taken his career in forgery as a revenge for being considered an untalented artist. Fooling the same art critics who had once rejecting his works turned out to be very exciting for the forger, although he still went to prison (*Freemart consultancy archives*, internet consult).

After the war Paris became the greatest art market while the United States watched the growth of a truly modern school. Several painters were famous and their works wanted worldwide: Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Miró and Dalí, among others. In the 60's there was a great bunch of forgers such as David Stein (*«who had managed one day to have a forged Picasso oil painting authenticated by the master himself, was arrested after Marc Chagall saw a forged oil painting exhibited in a New York Gallery»*), Elmir de Hory and Real Lessart, the specialist in faking Chagall, Picasso, Dufy and post-impressionists. There were even agents for forgers, fake dealers such as Fernand Legros (*Freemart consultancy archives*, internet consult). Artists themselves usually denied their own works and were deceived by low prices they achieved in the market. Such were the cases of Giorgio de Chirico who *«was charged in 1969 for having seized some of his sculptures as forgeries whereas he had signed a legal contract for their production»* (*Freemart consultancy archives*, internet consult) and for instance, Maurice de Vlaminck, who *«refused to authenticate some of his own oil paintings simply because he did not like them anymore. He also was charged and received a fine for having rejected an oil painting which was in fact genuine»* (*Freemart consultancy archives*, internet consult).

Other cases could be quoted, such the Keating scandal, in England during the 70's, but bottom-line we can estimate that 15% of paintings sold today are fakes, according to the *Freemart consultancy archives* (*Freemart consultancy archives*, internet consult).

As Peter Watson wrote in the Observer, *«I know that many people are fascinated by forgeries and pastiches, since in many cases the difference between them and the real thing seems hard to fathom. Why, therefore, people ask, is the one worth so much when the other isn't?»* (Watson, 1994). In fact copies reach unbelievable prices all over the world. It is very common having copies of famous works of art at home, mainly because originals are at museums worldwide, so it is unthinkable for the common man to own one at home. People are satisfied with a beautiful copy of a great master, since they don't live at the Louvre or at Prado Museum. Market prices for copies may be surprising: *«Among the six Rembrandts are two copies of the same picture, the double portrait known as The Jewish Bride. One is by Johan Hendrik Baartscheer, 1874-1937 (Df 10 000 – Df 15 000) and the other by Egbert Rubertus Derk Schaap, 1862-1939 (Df 4 000 – Df 6 000)»* (Watson, 1994). The author also wrote that in some cases copies gain energy on their own, becoming an individual entity rather than being just a copy. Some originals do not have the same sparkle and life that some copies present. *«The irony is that, because of the way our attitudes to copies have been conditioned down the years, prices are now way below those for mediocre or even worse than mediocre, originals»* (Watson, 1994).

Nowadays copies are taken as a minor thing, a true deception. Then why do some forgeries have such high prices in the market, such as the Renoir, Picasso and Modigliani fakes, John Wyatt, whose paintings could rise up to 75 000 euro? (Tubella, 2007).

### Conclusion – Conservation, originals and fakes

Conservation field offers important tools to this matter: science and technology. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century science was applied to distinguish "originals" from fakes. This does not mean that fakes were not identified in the past but today we have different tools, but is it enough? *«It would be misleading to end with the comforting impression that scientific advance and scholarly expertise can solve all problems»* (Jones, 1990: 321). We do believe this is true, not only because some objects identified as fakes were later proved to be genuine, but also because conservation cannot lean merely on "original". On behalf of "original" many material evidence has been gone forever, removed during interventions. Although it is not easy to define one universal truth about this matter, we conservators and restorers also need to have in mind that we are still very close to the 19<sup>th</sup> century passion for Time. We treasure old, antique and genuine but perhaps there is more of our History we are forgetting to preserve. Fakes are a part of us, a mirror of ego, society values and desires. They are mirrors of our human condition (greedy, misleading but still ingenious and ultimately genius). Fakes are a part of Art History and History as much genuine objects and documents. They are not inert and passive, they have changed the

course of events as we have been able to analyze in this paper. How come it is fair that we conservation scientists can claim what's to keep and what's to destroy? This is particularly true for additions (retouching, re-paintings, re-coatings). Maybe what "original" teaches is that if deciding what to keep is a hard task, for so many reasons, we do need a better documentation system.

Ultimately we can ask... When it comes to conservation, is it possible to claim that conservation is more important than originals? Why does Lascaux II work so well? How many of the art objects we gaze at in museums are really genuine? Does it really make a difference? Or does the difference only reside in knowing they are fakes thus triggering deception? And can we conservator-restorers allow ourselves to be deceived?

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