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## Berlin: True Copy, Brighton Festival 2019 review - tricky forgery masterclass

Superbly conceived and crafted multimedia theatre piece about art forgery

by [Thomas H Green](#) | Tuesday, 28 May 2019

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Master forger Geert Van Jansen tells all

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This brilliantly conceived and executed [show](#) is about provenance in [art](#). It's also about our perceptions of the truth. However, it's a show where it would be churlish to reveal too much of what goes on. This is, of course, perverse since some will be reading to find out exactly that, but the brain-frazzling thrill of *True Copy*, alongside the story it tells engagingly and with humour, is delivered by the stunning twists and turns it throws in, which would be ruined if even hinted at.

Berlin are the most perversely named, unGoogleable company. They're from Belgium and major in multimedia pieces but the ones this writer has seen in the past (*Zvizdal*, about an old couple who remained living near Chernobyl, and *Bonanza*, about a tiny, isolated Colorado town) were essentially [documentary films](#) with additional installation art and theatricality in their presentation. *True Copy* is much more of a show, an experience, albeit initially informal in tone.

The subject is the Dutch art forger Geert Jan Jansen, who's present and to whom we're introduced. It looks at first as if he's to be interviewed by one of the Berlin team but then he takes off on his own, a bespectacled figure in a maroon suit, speaking his native tongue with subtitles at the back translating. He wanders about, takes us into his world. Behind him is a wall of paintings in gold frames, forgeries that he's done; Magritte, Picasso, Dali and many more. Only they turn out not to be actual paintings but screens on which aspects of his story play out.

Jan Jansen's speciality was creating paintings in the style of renowned artists and passing them off as newly found works. He started with Karel Appel – who would later authenticate Jan Jansen's work as his own – but, before he was arrested in 1994, was forging on a grand scale from a base in rural France. He reveals that behind the wall of paintings/screens, Berlin have recreated his studio and with a handheld camera he disappears there, and we watch him demonstrate the art of

“ *The subject is the Dutch art forger Geert Jan Jansen, who's present* ”

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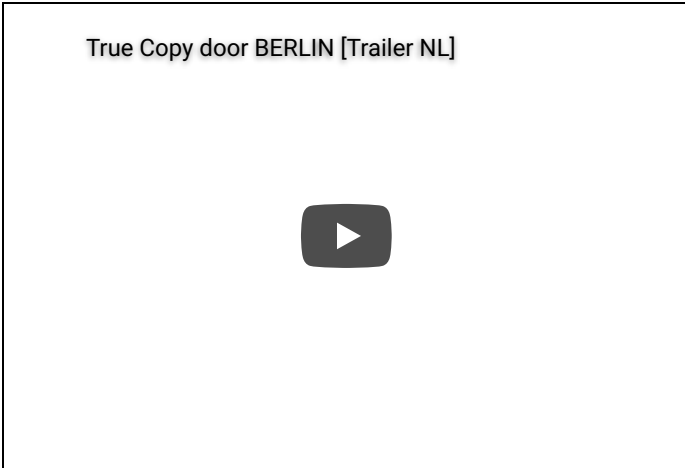
handheld camera he disappears there, and we watch him demonstrate the art of sketching like Matisse or creating a Picasso signature via the screens.

He is a mischief-maker, dryly funny, as he shows us techniques to age paintings, including leaving them under the doormat for a fortnight, but he weaves a series of serious philosophical points into proceedings, as he reveals how the art world was complicit in his crimes, how they were not keen to assist in his prosecution for it would devalue their own business. He asks, "The forger makes a fool of the expert, so who is the expert?"

From there, *True Copy* enters uncharted waters, does things that are highly unexpected. It plays games with the audience's understanding. Even writing this I've become an accessory to Berlin's fibbing, for not everything written above is fully true. What does that even mean? To unpick that idea, to investigate the very meaning of authenticity, is what the evening is all about, and amidst its multi-layered twists and turns it does an excellent and entertaining job of making us question our own perceptions.

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Below: watch trailer for *Berlin: True Copy*



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