Fig. 1.—Plaster cast of a terracotta bust of Girolamo Benivieni by Giovanni Bastianini. Reproduced by permission of V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Giovanni Bastianini, Art Forgery, and the Market in Nineteenth-Century Italy*

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For art historians, journalists, and legal experts, the act of art forgery is a difficult concept to explain with historical precision. The act itself can be defined easily enough: forgery is the creation of a work of art with the intent to deceive.¹ Yet the history of forgery is both protean and elusive. Although examples of forgery date back centuries, the significance of the act frequently depends on a specific context—for example, the increase in demand for a particular kind of art. Many experts agree that the presence of intent defines a forgery, but few agree on the motives to explain art forgery in any meaningful sense. Many experts agree that the presence of intent defines a forgery, they tend to focus on the specific motivations of individual forgers (revenge, frustration, egotism, greed), and these come to overshadow other possible explanations for deception. Any satisfactory historical explanation of forgery must reconcile this tension between locating the practice in a particular context and explaining the act according to the contingencies of individual motive. Varied efforts to explain the history of art forgery have highlighted key moments (ancient Greece, the Renaissance, the nineteenth century) in a sprawling narrative in which contingency frequently overshadows context.²

¹ I wish to thank the librarians, archivists, and staff at the American Academy in Rome; the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive; the British Library; the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence; the Biblioteca Nazionale, Rome; the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome; and Penrose Library, University of Denver. Research for this article was supported by several grants from the University of Denver. I would like to thank Elizabeth Karisgoldt for her insightful comments, as well as the anonymous readers of this article, who made invaluable observations and suggestions.

² The classic texts on the history of art forgery include Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Fakes and Forgeries (Minneapolis, 1973); F. Amnau, Three Thousand Years of Deception in Art and Antiquities (London, 1961); John E. Conklin, Art Crime (Westport, CT, 1994); W. G. Constable, Forgers and Forgeries (New York, 1954); Dennis Dutton, ed., The Forger’s Art: Art Forgery and the Philosophy of Art (Berkeley, 1983); Thomas Hoving, False Impressions: The Hunt for Big-Time Art Fakes (New York, 1996); Mark Jones, ed., Fake? The Art of Deception (Berkeley, 1990); Otto Kurz,
That the history of art forgery focuses on the individual forger and his motives is understandable: readers are drawn irresistibly to the many reasons people deceive others. And, as Sándor Radnóti has observed, audiences identify with the forger as a “picaresque” hero, or one “whose unmasking, voluntary or involuntary, always reveals something about art and the art world,” usually the ability of a mischievous individual to wreak havoc on the art market or cause embarrassment among experts and collectors. Forgery narratives become picaresque tales, Radnóti suggests, because of the room they allow for interpretation, not only by the art historian or journalist but by the readers as well: “although the audience has also been deceived in most of the cases, it usually sides with the forger against the art world.” The audience’s desire to identify with the forger-hero has focused a disproportionate amount of attention on the individual artist as the perpetrator of deception. Thus, the literature is weighted toward the same examples in which there is sufficient evidence of motive or, in the absence of such evidence, conjectural or sensationalist reporting of specific forgeries. The analytic weight given to these individual cases distorts the significance of art forgery within a particular community at any given time; it also prevents us from properly historicizing forgery as a deceptive practice within a specific context. And, despite Anthony Grafton’s thoughtful work on literary forgery and its consequences for criticism, few historians have taken up the question of what the broader implications of forgery might be within areas like intellectual inquiry, cultural production, or the workings of the market.

It is ironic that so much attention has been focused on the artist’s intent or motive when most of the debates over or conversations about forgery tend to be shaped around the artist but do not usually involve him or her directly. The content of these debates and conversations, however, could potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of the history of forgery. For example, it seems obvious that the level of demand within the art market is related to the


3 Radnóti, _Fake_ , 10.


number of forgeries produced or that the rise of connoisseurship was related to the increased detection of forgeries. Yet there are few historical studies that examine the relationship between the individual artist and the larger structural issues that influence the shifting meanings of art forgery. In this article, I will examine the practice of forgery and the state of the art market in nineteenth-century Italy, considered by art consumers as both a warehouse of valued antiquities and a workshop for adulterations, forgeries, copies, and imitations. Given that Italy was the site of both intense demand for and a suspicious increase in the supply of valuable objects, the nation is particularly significant for what it tells us about the interrelatedness of market and forgery.

First, I will focus on the Italian sculptor Giovanni Bastianini (1830–68), who worked in Florence. Bastianini was an artist who made convincing imitations of Renaissance sculptures. His work was eventually displayed as authentic Renaissance sculpture in the collections and museums of France and Britain. After Bastianini was discovered to be the contemporary author of these works, his reputation, or notoriety, became international within communities of collectors, connoisseurs, and museum officials. I have chosen Bastianini because so many of the published accounts of his life conform to the standard forgery narrative of the frustrated genius who profits from a set of particular circumstances. His story conforms to the conventional narrative, in particular, Radnóti’s narrative of the “picaresque hero,” but this narrative tends to cover up the more compelling story of what was at stake in these accusations of forgery and the consequences of unrestrained demand for authentic yet inexpensive Italian antiquities and art. With regard to the Bastianini controversy, I am more interested in what the evidence tells us about the context of forgery—in this case the contest for power between Italy and France in the 1860s—and less interested in Bastianini’s motives to deceive. In this case, Bastianini’s reputation was determined more by historical circumstance than by the artworks he created. I will argue that the label of “forger” may be correct for some of his activities, but the term does little to answer the question of how his work created such an international controversy.

More important, perhaps, I have chosen Bastianini because his notoriety comes in the early years of the new nation-state, a period when Italy was trying to define itself just as increasing numbers of foreigners were discovering what they understood as Italian art. Bastianini was one of the first of many Italian art forgers who confirmed the reputation of Italians for deceiving the unwitting and inexperienced customers in the very fluid art-and-antiquities market of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reputation Italians gained for perpetrating and allowing art forgery at this time was first generated by journalists and later reinforced by historians and art historians; many experts viewed the specific increase in forgeries as a logical outgrowth of
excessive demand for Italian works, but a number of notable experts in Italian art—including John Pope-Hennessy and Bernard Berenson—attributed forgery to a timelessly unscrupulous Italian character. What followed the observations of Berenson and Pope-Hennessy were uncritical condemnations of Italians as deceivers—uncritical in the sense that few experts acknowledged the conditions that they themselves created to facilitate or encourage the production of forgeries.

This aspect of Italian identity, created and perpetuated largely by foreigners, is bound up with the history of art forgery and the growth of the international market for Italian art in the nineteenth century. Like debates about forgery, the contours of the market had little to do with actual artists and more to do with assigning value to art through contests for power. This market constituted the structural framework for the proliferation of art forgeries in Italy, yet it remains largely unexplored in the academic literature. In the second half of this article, I shall explore in detail the workings of this market in order to provide a broader context for Bastianini’s life and work. I will focus specifically on the ways in which Italian artists and art dealers responded to powerful and varied surges in demand for Italian art. Here, it is clear that Italian artists and dealers intended to deceive their customers, but “forgery” is an analytically weak term to describe their actions. The reputation of Italians as skilled art forgers must be read against their understanding of consumer demand and its consequences, specifically, their understanding of the less tangible aspects—appearance, fantasy, desire—of the antiquities and art markets. Moreover, the actions of Italian artists and dealers must be viewed within the context of the unrelenting foreign demand for genuine objects at reasonable prices. The Italian art market developed in such a way as to facilitate the satisfaction of both the emotional and the material needs of foreign clients, largely by means of forgery, copying, and imitation.

6 “The forging of Renaissance sculptures was simply an extension of the immemorial trade in forged antiques” (John Pope-Hennessy, “The Forging of Italian Renaissance Sculpture,” Apollo 99, no. 146 [April 1974]: 242–67, 245). Bernard Berenson warned, “For the Italians, from the Quattrocento on, have always been clever forgers, and the technical skill of the race that produced the greatest European school of painting is by no means dead. Taste is dead and honesty has not yet come to take its place; but extreme dexterity remains” (“Art Forgeries,” letter to the editor, New York Times, April 4, 1903, 13). See De Marchi, Falsi primitivi, for a thorough discussion of art historians’ writings on Italian forgery.

7 Or it is explored only superficially; this is one of the arguments made by De Marchi in Falsi primitivi.
GIOVANNI BASTIANINI AND THE NARRATIVES OF FORGERY

There is no question that Giovanni Bastianini was the best-known forger in nineteenth-century Italy. More articles and book chapters have been written about him than about any other Italian forger or artist of the same period. Much of this writing conforms to a narrative that details how Bastianini grew up impoverished and fell prey to an unscrupulous art dealer, Giovanni Freppa, who corrupted Bastianini’s artistic skill (some refer to his brilliance) by allegedly selling his sculptures as genuine Renaissance art objects. The details of this victimization narrative were first recounted in Nina Barstow’s 1886 article published in the British Magazine of Art and continue to be repeated through recent times. Although there has been a wide range of opinion regarding the level of Bastianini’s artistic abilities, most art historical and journalistic accounts of his life argue that he possessed greater technical skill and more artistic sensibility than the average forger. Insofar as an artist can create “authentic” forgeries, Bastianini came close to channeling the spirit of the Renaissance in his works. Similarly, there has been a wide range of opinion regarding Bastianini’s intent to deceive others; some authors defend his innocence, while others depict him as conspiring with his dealer. Only recently has an art historian reappraised his life and work by highlighting his original sculptures in contemporary styles and urging that use of the label “forgery” to describe his actions be reconsidered.

Bastianini was born into humble circumstances in 1830 at Ponte alla Badia, Fiesole. The son of a stonemason, he began working at an early age to support his family by running errands for various artists in Florence. Published accounts of his life disagree on the level of training Bastianini received as an artist. He did not receive formal training at the Florentine Academy, as

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9 Nina Barstow, “The Forgeries of Bastianini,” Magazine of Art 9 (1886): 503–8. John Pope-Hennessy focused on this exploitative relationship, as did Lawrence Jeppson. Thomas Hoving recently characterized the relationship between Bastianini and Freppa slightly differently—the two worked together to fool the art world (False Impressions, 194–97).


11 Anita F. Moskowitz, “The Case of Giovanni Bastianini: A Fair and Balanced View,” Artibus et Historiae 50 (2004): 157–85. Since I am a historian and not an art historian, I am interested in Bastianini’s work, not for its aesthetic value but for what it tells us about the state of the art market in the nineteenth century. I leave the formal analysis of his imitations and original work—I think wisely—to art historians.
reported by art historian John Pope-Hennessy, but he did apprentice at several well-known studios in Florence. Bastianini began sculpting on his own in 1848, after he met Giovanni Freppa, a former charcoal seller who took up the antiquities trade. In exchange for studio space and a modest stipend, Bastianini worked on commissioned pieces for Freppa, who then sold them in his shop. This business relationship has usually been described in terms of Freppa’s exploitation of Bastianini, but it seems important to note that the arrangement allowed Bastianini to work on projects of his own choosing: busts and reliefs in marble and terra-cotta, some imitating Renaissance style and some in a more contemporary style. In this regard, Bastianini was typical of many nineteenth-century Italian artists, who mixed the original with the imitative and the contemporary with the traditional. His work was exhibited throughout the 1850s at the Promotrici Fiorentine and the annual exhibitions at the Florentine Academy. Most published narratives of Bastianini’s life have exaggerated the extent of his victimization, however, given that he became known for the sculptures later labeled forgeries and not for his original contributions to the Florentine art world.

Bastianini became the subject of an international controversy in 1867, when he claimed authorship of a bust of Girolamo Benivieni that was displayed at the Louvre as a Renaissance work (see fig. 1). Subsequently, much was written about Bastianini as a clever and frustrated artist who consciously deceived others. The historical record, however, is less clear about the question of whether Bastianini intended to deceive others or whether he was the unwitting dupe of Freppa. The 1867 debate over the authenticity of the Benivieni bust, while not overtly labeling Bastianini a forger, denied him a reputation as an artist in his own right. Thus, Bastianini was condemned to assume his place as the first of a string of internationally known forgers from the new nation of Italy.

In 1863, Giovanni Freppa commissioned a terra-cotta bust of Girolamo

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13 Bastianini’s artistic activities in Florence are recounted in Bernardina Sani, “Le vrai et le faux dans l’oeuvre de Bastianini,” Revue de L’Art 21 (1973): 102–7. In the first decade after unification, Florence became the center of the national art scene for Italy as it was the capital of Italy at that time (1864–70). To exhibit work in Florence at one of the promotrici was a considerable accomplishment, then.

14 One account even goes so far as to argue that Bastianini could have become a great artist, had it not been for Freppa’s constant commissioning of forgeries from him. Cyril G. E. Bunt, “An Exploited Genius: Bastianini,” Connoisseur 110, no. 486 (January 1943): 134–39, 158.
Benivieni from Bastianini for the sum of 350 francs. There were few existing representations of Benivieni, who was a significant figure in Florentine literary and political life but was perhaps best known for being a follower of Girolamo Savonarola. Bastianini used an image from an old coin and had a local tobacco worker, Giuseppe Buonaiuti, pose as his model. The following year, Freppa displayed the bust at the Albergo Leon Bianco, where it attracted the attention of French dealer Count De Nolivos, who purchased the bust in November 1864 for 700 francs and brought it to Paris. Freppa later claimed that he never meant to sell the bust as a genuine antique work nor as a modern copy. Rather, he claimed that he sold the bust to De Nolivos as “that which he saw and examined.” The initial purchase was unremarkable; it was not unusual for Freppa to double his investment with the sale of a piece. Back in Paris, however, De Nolivos placed the Benivieni bust on display at the Musée Rétrospectif until he offered it for sale as part of an auction at the Hotel Drouet in 1866, where it attracted the attention of Alfred Émilien O’Hara de Nieuwerkerke, then superintendent for Imperial Museums under Napoleon III. Nieuwerkerke purchased the bust for a sum of 13,600 francs. It was then held in Nieuwerkerke’s private collection until he sold it to the state for display in the Louvre in January 1867. There it was installed alongside the work of Michelangelo and Benvenuto Cellini.

Count Nieuwerkerke’s participation brought heightened political significance to the Benivieni affair. Over the course of Napoleon III’s reign, Nieuwerkerke had become the most powerful individual in the French art world. An artist and collector, Nieuwerkerke rose to power with the assistance of Princess Mathilde, who urged her cousin Napoleon III to appoint him superintendent of Imperial Museums in 1863. Nieuwerkerke’s long-standing affair with Princess Mathilde, his questionable acquisitions of public art, and his haughty attitude in dealing with artists made him the subject of continued controversy throughout the 1860s until his fall from grace in 1870. Despite the continued criticism of his performance, Nieuwerkerke managed to advance his career steadily, and his character was marked by resiliency to criticism and determination to succeed.

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15 One version of the story suggests that Bastianini made a bust using the cigar worker as a model, and afterward an observer noted the resemblance to Benivieni. Nobili, Gentle Art of Faking, 182–83.
19 Testimony of Giovanni Freppa, January 15, 1867, reprinted in Alessandro Foresi, Tour de Babel ou Objets d’Art Faux pris pour vrais et vice versa (Paris, 1868), 76.
17 He was also criticized for his attempts to have several paintings at the Louvre restored, an effort that was considered something of a botched job by many artists.
18 As art historian Patricia Mainardi described him, “He weathered the . . . acquisition of expensive fakes for museum collections, the loan of Louvre treasures for imperial interior decoration . . . The man had charm” (Art and Politics of the Second
Yet Nieuwerkerke’s power did not go uncontested. There was, for example, much criticism of the exposition. Several foreign countries exhibited their fine arts apart from the main exhibit, and several French artists mounted their own shows in competition with the exposition. Interest in the Benivieni bust, then, served as a welcome counterbalance to such protests. Critics and artists alike gathered to view the bust and determine who the artist was; suggestions included Donatello, Verrocchio, Desiderio da Settignano, Mino da Fiesole, Antonio Rossellino, and Lorenzo di Credi. In the absence of any knowledge of its sculptor, rumors circulated throughout Paris, intimating that the bust was of more recent origin. Fueled by resentment of Nieuwerkerke’s power and what some saw as his abuse of authority, the rumors suggested that Nieuwerkerke knew the bust was a forgery and tried to cover up his error by selling it to the French government. One of the most popular stories told of how Alessandro Foresi, a well-known art collector in Florence, tried to sell genuine antiques to Nieuwerkerke for the Louvre’s collection. When Nieuwerkerke dismissed Foresi’s claims of authenticity, Foresi purportedly shot back in anger: “You will not give the just value for real objects of antique art and yet you pay 13,000 francs for that ‘Benivieni’ which is a thing of to-day!” 19 However the rumors started, they continued to circulate, fueled by the observations of Florentine artists that Giovanni Freppa frequently collaborated with the artist Giovanni Bastianini, who was known for making excellent imitations of Renaissance sculptures and busts.

Freppa addressed the rumors by publishing a confession in December 1867, in which he admitted that he had commissioned the Benivieni bust from Giovanni Bastianini and sold it to Count De Nolivos as “that which he saw and examined.” There followed a furious debate waged in the French and Italian press over the presumed authenticity of the piece. French critics believed that Freppa was embarrassed at having sold an authentic Renaissance bust for so little money; his published confession was therefore a way of defending his reputation as an antique dealer. Italians responded by hinting that deception was perpetrated in Paris, where the modest price of a good

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19 As reported in Barstow, “Forgeries of Bastianini,” 507.
imitation became hyperinflated in the French art market. Rumors also circulated in Italy that Nieuwerkerke had discovered that the sculpture was a recent creation and sold it to the Louvre to cover up his mistake and potential embarrassment. Meanwhile, Freppa collected testimony from forty-one individuals who swore that they witnessed some aspect of the creation of the bust by Bastianini.20 At this point, some of the French art periodicals, such as La Chronique des arts et de la Curiosité, accepted the fact that the Benivieni bust was a contemporary work and even suggested that Bastianini sculpt under his own name, given the extraordinary quality of the work in question.21 Still, a group of French artists issued a challenge, published in Le Nord on December 20, 1867: if Bastianini were the artist of the Benivieni bust, let him make something of equal merit for a reward of 15,000 francs. A challenge of this type was not unusual in the standard forgery narrative; even after a work is exposed as a fake, it continues to be defended as genuine, and the artist is challenged to prove himself “capable” of producing such a skilled forgery.22 To save his honor and reputation as an artist, Bastianini replied in the Florentine journal Il Diritto, on January 10, 1868, that he would take up the challenge. He then began work on a series of busts of the twelve Caesars, to be judged by a French committee of experts.

For the French sculptor M. E. Lequesne, the sworn testimony of witnesses did not prove that the bust was a forgery. It was entirely possible, Lequesne argued, that a tobacco worker in contemporary Florence could resemble Benivieni. To support his case for authenticity, Lequesne concentrated on the technical qualities of the work, more specifically, how the bust was constructed and the type of dirt used to make the terracotta.23 These details, Lequesne argued, proved beyond a doubt that the bust was made during the Renaissance. Responding to Lequesne in the Gazzetta di Firenze in March 1868, Bastianini described how and why he added certain details, such as the drilling of tiny holes near the hairline. He maintained rather obviously that the

20 As there were no existing photographs or images of Buonaiuti, witness statements regarding the resemblance between Buonaiuti and Benivieni were important. Many of the witnesses were quick to point out that they had no idea where the bust was going or how it was going to be used. Some of the witness statements were printed in Foressi, Tour de Babel, 75–82.
21 La Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité, December 15, 1867, 299.
22 The challenge to the forger is part of the picaresque narrative of forgery, see Radnóti, Fake, chap. 1, “Picaresque Aesthetics.”
23 This behavior, philosopher L. B. Cebik argues, is a clear indication of suspicion of forgery: “In the presence of a suspected forgery, we are alert and wary. Rather than focusing upon the normal or regular elements of a work of the kind in question, we attend to the elements of forgery. No longer does form and color challenge and delight us. Instead we focus upon dirt in surface cracks, upon pigment composition, or upon the minuta of brush strokes” (“On the Suspicion of Art Forgery,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 47, no. 2 [1989]: 147–56, 148–49).
reason the bust seemed so authentic was because he was a capable student of Renaissance sculpture, attuned to the stylistic and technical characteristics of the era. Here Bastianini drew on an Italian tradition of understanding art as perfect imitation, just as Giorgio Vasari understood Michelangelo’s *Sleeping Cupid*, a presumed copy of a classical work, as an “original” creation and proof of the artist’s excellent craftsmanship and startling genius. For Vasari and Italian artists, and art experts to follow, technical craftsmanship and artistic invention could be combined, not to produce forgeries but to create works of art.  

Bastianini concluded his response by offering the plaster cast he had made of the bust (fig. 1), as well as a portrait he had made of Buonaiuti. Despite mounting evidence in support of the bust’s recent origins, not everyone was ready to admit that Bastianini had fooled French art critics and artists. Bastianini set to work on the twelve Caesars. In a letter to Alessandro Foresi, dated February 15, 1868, Bastianini lamented the continued intransigence of the French, who were clearly fooled by his work yet judged all art with an air of “Papal infallibility.” His complaints demonstrate that he recognized that the definition of good art was largely out of his hands. Even though French critics such as Lequesne were fooled by the Benvenuti bust, they based their understanding of art on the qualities of originality and authenticity. Thus, a good imitation or copy was not art but a base forgery. Here, the French critics chose not to value Bastianini’s technical skill publicly, despite the fact that there was a considerable population of Italian craftsmen who “ghosted” in the premiere workshops of Paris, where their technical skills were used and even prized. Louvre officials removed the bust from public display in early 1868, thereby putting an end to continued French speculation about the bust’s authenticity and Italian desires to see the bust honored as art worthy of display in the Louvre. The challenge to Bastianini to save his reputation was never met. Giovanni Bastianini died on June 29, 1868, after a short illness; his twelve Caesars were unfinished.

The Benvenuti controversy did not die with Bastianini; even after his death, rumors continued to circulate in Florence regarding the decision to remove the Benvenuti bust from display at the Louvre. Italian artists labeled this removal an act of revenge and argued for the sculpture to be placed in the gallery of

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24 On Vasari’s interpretation of Michelangelo, see Radnóti, *Fake*, 1–5. The French should have understood the value of imitation in art; after all, French artists were trained to imitate classical works. The Prix de Rome was the most prestigious award a young artist could receive, given the opportunity it provided for the artist to learn from ancient Roman art.

25 Parts of the exchange were also printed in the French journal *La Patrie*. Much of the exchange was collected and printed in Foresi, *Tour de Babel*, 97–102; and in Paul Eudel, *Le Trauage: Le contrefaçons dévoilées* (Paris, 1887), 174–76.

contemporary art. Alessandro Foresi, one of Bastianini’s most ardent defenders, maintained that Napoleon III had privately viewed the bust and desired that it remain on display.27 Italians who criticized the decision of French museum officials failed to comprehend how the Benvenuti bust was not considered an important work of contemporary art. Indeed, Italians failed to comprehend how their nation’s contribution to the world of contemporary art mattered so little in the realm of French, and foreign, opinion. From late eighteenth-century neoclassicism, to the historical works and purism of the Napoleonic era, to the naturalism and experimental school of the Macchiaioli of the Risorgimento, Italian art in the nineteenth century was diverse in subject matter and rich in regional variation, paying homage to the past as well as experimenting with the technologies of the future.28 Although Ottocento paintings and sculptures are now valued and therefore collectible, at the time these works were dismissed by the French, who viewed Italian art as lacking in both aesthetic and social significance.29 In the 1867 Universal Exposition, for example, only one Italian contemporary artist was awarded a medal of honor: genre painter Stefano Ussi received an award for his Duke of Athens. Yet this decision was roundly dismissed by French art critics as a political and not an aesthetic choice—a symbolic demonstration of French support for the Italian Risorgimento. Critics even pointed out how Ussi’s work was little more than a debased form of history painting. Given Italy’s prior history of classical artistic tradition, such mediocre work was tantamount to treason.30

Thus, the outcome of the Benvenuti scandal pitted France against Italy in a

27 Alessandro Foresi, Sulle porcellane Medicee: Lettera al Barone di Monville e poche parole riguardanti gli scultori Conte di Nieuwerkerke e Giovanni Bastianini (Florence, 1869), 9–10.
28 The study of nineteenth-century (Ottocento) art in Italy became popular only in the last thirty years. There have been several fine studies of the Macchiaioli, perhaps the best-known school of nineteenth-century Italy, as well as exhibitions, exhibition catalogs, and articles on various movements of the nineteenth century. For a broad overview of Ottocento art, see the essays in the exhibition catalog Ottocento: Romanticism and Revolution in 19th-Century Italian Painting, ed. Roberta J. M. Olson (New York, 1992); Enrico Castelnuovo, ed., La pittura in Italia: L’ottocento, 2 vols. (Milan, 1991); and Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli, Fernando Mazzocca, and Carlo Sisi, Ottocento: Da Canova al quarto stato (Milan, 2008).
29 On the exhibitions, see Mainardi, Art and Politics of the Second Empire. Mainardi observed that “the foreign nations were condemned—by the French—to have but a single, often overly simplified, national characteristic,” whereas French art was consistently seen as being more complex and eclectic and, therefore, more meaningful (97).
struggle to define not only what was authentic in art but also what Renaissance art in particular meant to their nations. For the French, the possession of Italian Renaissance art objects reflected France’s advanced level of civilization and bolstered the reputation of Napoleon III’s regime. French art experts defended the authenticity of the bust through their discussion of technical details that would prove beyond doubt that Count Nieuwerkerke had made the right decision. In Italy, Renaissance art bolstered the reputation of the nation as well, although the newly formed Italian state did not possess the financial resources to catalog and display publicly all the masterworks from this era. For Italian experts, what seemed important was conveying the idea of the Renaissance; here Bastianini’s work perfectly illustrated his nation’s enthusiasm for the Renaissance revival through imitation and reproduction. Ultimately, the struggle to define the Renaissance (or resituate it in a national context) was a contest of power that France won: the bust was removed from the museum’s permanent collection. Up until this point, French critics and experts were reluctant to admit that the Benivieni bust was a recent creation or to consider Bastianini an artist, based on the merits of the bust. With the removal of the bust from the museum’s gallery, Bastianini’s fate as a forger was sealed. For well over a century after the controversy, there has been a profound difference of opinion between Italians and non-Italians as to whether Bastianini was a forger who intentionally tried to deceive people or an artist who possessed great technical skill in imitating Renaissance style. No doubt Bastianini’s untimely death and the lack of any clear evidence about his intent to deceive have fueled this debate, but its persistence suggests that there was much more at stake than Bastianini’s motives to deceive.

In Italy, artists and bureaucrats working for the Ministry of Public Instruction (which oversaw the Directorate General of Antiquities and Fine Arts)

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31 This was the case since 1861, after France acquired large portions of Giampietro Campana’s collection for the Louvre. Considered a big coup for Napoleon III, the transaction humiliated the Italian government, which had to part with very significant artistic treasures, on account of Campana’s legal troubles. A thorough history of the Campana collection can be found in Helen Borowitz and Albert Borowitz, Pawnshop and Palaces: The Fall and Rise of the Campana Art Museum (Washington, DC, 1991). Of course, there was nothing new about France’s desire to possess artistic emblems from past civilizations. As Andrew McClellan has observed, Revolutionary France’s commitment to conservation justified the appropriation of art as war booty: “Portraying itself as a politically and culturally superior nation, France claimed to be uniquely qualified to safeguard the world’s treasures for the benefit of mankind” (Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris [Cambridge, 1994], 7). This trend persisted with Napoleon Bonaparte, who continued to raid Italy for important works, creating long-standing animosity and inspiring various efforts by Italians to reappropriate their cultural patrimony. See Bette Oliver, From Royal to National: The Louvre Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale (Lanham, MD, 2007), chaps. 4 and 5.
defended Bastianini's reputation as an artist and denied that he was knowingly involved in forgery. The Italian minister of public instruction authorized the official purchase of the plaster cast of the Benivieni bust from Bastianini's heirs in the summer of 1868, specifically for the purpose of keeping the work out of the hands of non-Italians. Meanwhile, Bastianini's and Freppa's published admissions that they had created and sold other Renaissance-style busts and reliefs generated much anxiety among European dealers and museum curators, who combed through their collections in an effort to rid them of Bastianini's works. Beginning in 1896, the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) in London became the repository for Bastianini's work. Given that a significant part of the museum's mission was to display and promote technical craftsmanship, Bastianini was a superior example of the craft of imitation, and museum officials considered him an important artist in his own right. Nino Costa and Cristiano Banti, Italian artists who spent 10,000 lire on Bastianini's bust of Girolamo Savonarola, declared that they had little remorse about paying so much for a recently created work. Indeed, Nino Costa claimed to be "glad to find that such a distinguished artist was living and not dead." In 1883, Costa and Banti


33 For example, the correspondence regarding the acquisition of Bastianini's bust of Savonarola described the bust as "a specimen of the finest kind of terracotta portraiture, comparable to the fifteenth century work, not merely in execution, but in quality and excellence" and an object "of the highest interest for the history of art in this century." Nominal file, Costa, Professor Giovanni, 1888–96, MA/1/C2814, Victoria and Albert Museum Archive. On the history of the Victoria and Albert Museum's acquisition of forgeries, see Malcolm Baker, "Noble Works or Base Deceptions? Some Victorian Fakes and Forgeries," in The V&A Album 2, ed. John Frederick Physick (London, 1983), 384–91; and "Art Forgeries in Museums," Nation, January 25, 1906, 69.

34 Barstow, "Forgeries of Bastianini," 506. Bastianini sculpted the Savonarola bust some time before 1863; it was then artificially aged and buried in the backyard of Bastianini's former employer and local Etruscan expert, Cavalier N. Inghirami. It is not clear, however, how much Bastianini participated in aging and hiding the bust. When it was "discovered," the bust was put on display at a dealer's shop, where it attracted the attention of artists Nino Costa and Cristiano Banti, ardent patriots (Nino Costa in particular was known as an artist, a member of Young Italy, and a fervent supporter of the Risorgimento) who worried that it might be purchased by a foreigner and exported out of Italy. After several artists tried and failed to persuade Florence's inspector of galleries to purchase the bust, Costa and Banti paid 10,000 lire for the work and displayed it in 1864 at the Palazzo Riccardi to raise money for a local foundling hospital. Bastianini never revealed himself to be the artist of the bust, and the
arranged for the bust to be displayed at an international art exhibit in Rome, and in 1888 they lent it to the South Kensington Museum for an exhibit of Italian art. Years after the exhibit, in 1896, museum officials offered Costa 9,000 lire for the bust, yet he was willing to accept half that price as long as the bust remained on public display: “It is my hope that one of the most beautiful works of art made in recent centuries in Italy will become the property of one of the foremost museums of the civilized world, this would honor Italian artistic individuality.”

By 1919, Bastianini’s work had become so popular in Italy that antique dealers had to settle for copies of his imitations for their customers.

For well over a century, there have been sporadic attempts to rehabilitate Bastianini’s reputation as an artist, many of them published in Italy. For the majority of non-Italian critics, Bastianini was a proficient sculptor but not an artist. The public record on both sides is long and somewhat tedious, given how frequently Bastianini is used as an example of a “modern” forger, one who gained a significant reputation throughout Europe in the midst of growing international demand for Italian art and antiquities. The ongoing debate over whether to define his works as forgeries adds little to our understanding of the historical significance of a figure such as Bastianini, given that the authors get so bogged down in the question of whether Bastianini intended to deceive anyone. It seems fair to say that we will never know this with any degree of

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35 Letter from Giovanni Costa to the South Kensington Museum, dated December 6, 1896, nominal file, Costa, Professor Giovanni, 1888–96, MA/1/C2814, Victoria and Albert Museum Archive.


37 The debate is ably summarized by art historian Anita Moskowitz in her article on Bastianini; she concludes that “forger” is an inappropriate term to use for Bastianini, given his character and his record of achievement in contemporary sculpture. Moskowitz, “Case of Giovanni Bastianini,” 167–75, 177–80. Still, the debate over Bastianini’s intent to deceive continues. On the basis of recently discovered correspondence regarding another sculpture by Bastianini, Jeremy Warren paints a decidedly more negative portrait of Bastianini. Warren identifies another work by Bastianini and argues that he acted with “clear fraudulent intent” primarily because of his continued relationship with Giovanni Freppa, who played a very active role. Warren observes, in manufacturing forgeries. Moskowitz has questioned Warren’s conclusions, arguing that the focus on Bastianini’s supposed fraudulent works obscures his significance as a nineteenth-century artist. See Jeremy Warren, “Forgery in Risorgimento Florence: Bastianini’s ‘Giovanni delle Bande Nere’ in the Wallace Collection,” Burlington Magazine 142, no. 1232 (November 2005): 729–41, 729; and Anita F. Moskowitz,
certainty. With regard to the Benivieni scandal, the more intriguing issue is the published debate over the authenticity of the piece.

Within this debate, there is little mention of Bastianini’s particular motives or intent; in fact, much of the discussion ignores the artist. After the “discovery” of the Benivieni bust, French and Italian participants sought to determine its origins. This was followed by efforts to identify any wrongdoing and, in so doing, to cast blame on the guilty. Here, the Italians maintained that there was considerable intrigue behind the scenes, hinting at a possible cover-up by Nieuwerkerke and other French officials. French experts may have been embarrassed by a foolishly expensive purchase, but they were able to exert enough power to define the Benivieni bust as a forgery and not a work of art. In so doing, the French condemned Bastianini to a posthumous history as a forger and not an artist. Still, the rumors of intrigue are suggestive for what they imply about the market. Italians understood the market for valuable museum pieces as a high-stakes game in which Italians furnished the objects for display and foreign experts “played along”—unless, of course, the work was revealed as a contemporary piece.

The sharp disparity between Italian and non-Italian evaluations of Bastianini indicates, at the very least, that Italians maintained a different attitude toward copies and imitations, one that did not regard them as intentionally deceitful. This attitude was rooted in immediate historical circumstance as well as a longer artistic tradition of imitation.38 Non-Italian experts did not recognize Bastianini as an artist because he created imitations of Renaissance style. Thus, he lacked the originality and genius that defined an artist in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Anita Moskowitz has argued, most art historians have ignored Bastianini’s place in nineteenth-century Italian sculpture, a field dominated more by the artists Antonio Canova, Giuseppe Grandi,

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38 Maria Antonietta Picone-Petrusa, commenting on Italian art exhibitions after national unification, observed that the nineteenth century, a “century which more than any other had affirmed the Romantic concepts of ‘originality’ and ‘individuality’ was also the century that, in the name of Historismus, took the concept of ‘imitation’ to a extreme of counterfeit and parody.” Throughout Italy, the concept of imitation assumed a form of playful intentionality, as artists competed with each other to “show off” their technical skills in art exhibits; the Florentine art community was not immune to this trend (“The Neo-Renaissance at Exhibitions during the Later Nineteenth Century,” in Reviving the Renaissance: The Use and Abuse of the Past in Nineteenth-Century Italian Art and Decoration, ed. Rosanna Pavoni, trans. Adrian Bellon [Cambridge, 1997], 207–38, 237). It seems possible that Bastianini was at least aware of, if not an actual participant in, this artistic game of one-upmanship.
Vincenzo Gemito, Medardo Rosso, and Leonardo Bistolfi. Bastianini was, of course, not alone, given that many Italian artists of the nineteenth century failed to achieve any sort of international recognition for their work. Changing aesthetic tastes, the rise of connoisseurship, and the professionalization of the discipline of art history all reinforced Italy’s past, not contemporary, significance in the world of art. Aesthetic criticism was influenced by a more general trend in nineteenth-century intellectual circles toward recognizing and commemorating the culture of the Renaissance, for example, as a significant moment in the shared heritage of Western civilization. The European Renaissance revival reached its intellectual peak in the 1870s: witness the popularity of Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) and Jacob Burkhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). Thus, it seems unlikely that Bastianini’s portrait busts or other original sculptures would gain as much aesthetic recognition as did his tributes to the Renaissance.

Partly as a consequence of political difficulties and economic weaknesses in the era of the Risorgimento and afterward (1861–1900), Italy did not serve as a model of nation building for the rest of Europe. Generally, Italy afforded European and, later, American travelers a window on the past; its backward political and economic conditions provided a baseline against which their own progress could be assessed. Italy’s artistic heritage, however, was highly prized by a broad range of Europeans: intellectuals, tourists, and art dealers. Perhaps, as one writer on art forgery argued, Bastianini had no choice but to imitate the past, given that the art market and tourism condemned Italians to a kind of “artistic servitude”: “Every nineteenth-century Italian was a prisoner of the past: the monuments to bygone achievements assaulted the eye with every turn of the head. They conditioned the spirit and molded the mind, and there was no help for it.” Bastianini was no exception to the cultural dilemma faced by Italians generally—the nation was praised for its past but not its

39 Bastianini was comfortable in at least three styles of sculpture: portrayals of children that combined classicism with realism, contemporary portrait busts, and imitations of Renaissance style. Moskowitz, “Casc of Giovanni Bastianini.”


41 On the nineteenth-century Renaissance revival in Italy, see the essays in Pavoni, *Reviving the Renaissance*, esp. her introduction (1–14).

present. In political terms, this dilemma was best represented by the great disparity between the tourist's knowledge of Italy's past achievements and cynical appraisal of current conditions. In cultural terms, this dilemma was encapsulated by the narratives of forgery and deceit that characterized descriptions of the Italian art market in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

THE ART MARKET IN ITALY: NEGOTIATING DESIRE AND DEMAND

The international demand for Italian art boomed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as German, French, British, and American customers sought classical, Renaissance, and medieval works for museums and personal collections. Before the nineteenth century, there was a domestic market for ancient works during the Renaissance, ongoing domestic and foreign demand for religious works, and rising external demand (from British, French, and German customers) in the decades of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century, although much of the activity was located in and around the city of Rome. Certain characteristics of the Grand Tour market for art are worth noting, for they laid some of the foundations for the nineteenth-century market. First, eighteenth-century demand originated with foreign visitors, eager to locate and evaluate the tastes and skills of previous civilizations. Italians were valued or esteemed primarily for their past achievements by foreign artists, archaeologists, and antiquarians. In response to the growing


interest in locating, unearthinng, appraising, and buying ancient art, a number of Italians became tour guides, antiquarians, and dealers. Grand tourists needed Italians to show them around and provide all kinds of assistance. And, as Tamara Griggs has argued, some Italians improvised in response to the growing demand for Italian art and artistic authority, while others actively shaped the contours of the antiquities market through promoting their own expertise as a form of profitable authority. Men such as Francesco de' Ficoroni understood well the need to develop sophisticated and self-conscious ways to accommodate the emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual needs of increasing numbers of travelers, while men such as Bernardo Cavaceppi created forgeries to satisfy their material desires.45

Thus, Italians responded to this demand for antiquities with erudition, improvisation, and forgery. They may have participated actively in the fashioning of the Grand Tour market, but they could by no means exert continued control, and their contributions as connoisseurs or local agents of knowledge became less significant to the market in the nineteenth century, a time when the contours of the Italian art market changed dramatically. First, the sources of demand became more varied and encompassed different types of art and antiquities. The rise of museums and the expanding market for high art fed demand for expensive, original, and authentic works from the past, while a steady increase in tourism and collecting among the wealthier middle classes constituted a market for art of lesser value—not only less expensive antiquities but also genre paintings by Italian artists and objects suitable for decorating one’s estate, villa, or apartment. Ancient works, long coveted by academics, were perennially in demand, but the nineteenth century witnessed a powerful surge in demand for Renaissance pieces as well as peasant folk art of varying periods. And the site of the art market expanded outward from Rome to the rest of Italy, both urban and rural. In order to meet these streams of demand and to better accommodate the entry of private capital into art dealing (as opposed to more traditional methods of commissioning works or ordering them ahead of time), a new network for the sale and distribution of art encompassed points of purchase, such as auctions, private galleries, and small venues like art dealerships. Finally, both public and private buyers were now assisted by a growing body of experts, consultants, and connoisseurs, many of whom prized authenticity over aesthetic value and many of whom were not Italian. This body of experts actively supported both a network of relationships and a network of goods, although booming demand privileged the movement of goods over the solidity of professional and personal relationships.

A significant but frequently overlooked foundation of the nineteenth-century art market was the impact of the new nation-state. The rapid expansion of the art market in the latter half of the nineteenth century coincided with Italian unification and a more pressing need for a coherent art policy as well as varied efforts to take stock of the nation’s patrimony and keep valued objects within the country. As this section describes, however, such efforts were poorly implemented by the Italian government and rather dimly understood by non-Italian consumers. The result in Italy was a market in which demand was clearly articulated and defined, while the markers of supply were constantly shifting because of changes in laws and mounting rumors that the supply of “authentic” or original works was rapidly diminishing. The quest for “authentic” works from the classical, medieval, or Renaissance periods outstripped demand for contemporary Italian art.\(^46\) Not surprisingly, reported instances of forgery and imitation increased alongside rising consumer demand, until Italy became known as “one vast workshop of adulterated antiquities,” according to French critic Paul Eudel.\(^47\) Previously, forgers or imitators may have been punished by local authorities—the Bourbons, for instance, put a stop to Giuseppe Guerra’s forgeries in the middle of the eighteenth century—but the new Italian state took no definitive legal stand on forgery, imitation, or copying, preoccupied as it was with other matters.

Confronted by market pressures, Italians were simultaneously locked into reproducing various pasts for foreign buyers and self-consciously catering to a foreign desire for a piece of Italian history. More specifically, foreign customers desired to participate, as directly and intimately as possible, in the discovery of an original or authentic object. Certainly the rise of museums and private collections as cultural entities possessing distinct value meant that collectors, agents, and connoisseurs invested a great deal in the experience of buying, albeit for different reasons. For collectors, the experience might have enhanced their aesthetic passions; for agents and connoisseurs, the experience of purchase served to legitimate their authority and expertise.\(^48\) Thus, whims

\(^{46}\) It is important to point out that there was a market for contemporary art as well as one for antiquities and for art from the classical, medieval, and Renaissance periods. For example, Bastianini was not simply an imitator but a producer of contemporary sculpture and an artist in his own right. To examine the market for contemporary art would be beyond the scope of this article, however, so instead I will concentrate on the demand for art from the past, focusing on the desire for Renaissance art objects, although I acknowledge that there was considerable demand for classical and medieval objects as well.


\(^{48}\) Reflecting on what he thought was an inevitable relationship between forgery and collecting, Riccardo Nobili pointed out how the act of collecting is, above all, a passion. And, like many other passions, collecting did not always reflect normal or expected behaviors: “collecting, after all, is a passion, at times a deep and firmly rooted
or desires—to witness the discovery of an object or to wrest a purchase from a competitor—were nearly as important to the buyers as the objects themselves.

An Italian art market arose specifically to meet the emotional and material demands of an international clientele. Within this market, there was a fine line between satisfying these complex demands and purposefully deceiving others. As in the case of the Benivieni bust controversy, the difference in perspective between Italians and non-Italians led to acrimony, accusations of deceit, and hints that intrigue could be perpetrated on both sides of the art deal. Italian dealers presumed their non-Italian customers understood the less tangible aspects of these transactions and essentially “played along” in the sometimes elaborate scenarios of discovery and purchase. Foreign customers were chagrined and even outraged that Italians would knowingly deceive others with copies and imitations, yet few critics acknowledged the conditions that might have encouraged or even necessitated such behavior. The ensuing controversy over the state of the Italian art market offers clear evidence of a cultural divide that both contributed to the history of art forgery and reinforced negative stereotypes of the Italian character. The underlying issue was not so much the individual artist’s motives to deceive but rather the struggle either to control or to accommodate the market for Italian antiquities.

For the nineteenth-century art collector, Italy was a land rich in art and antiquities, possessing more than enough art for prospective buyers. According to American collector James Jackson Jarves, art was literally embedded in Italy’s soil. One need only dig in the dirt to discover an Etruscan tomb or the fragment of a column: “Italy is foremost in its harvests of antiquity, because her soil is the richest to work.” Alongside the valuable bounty of antiquities, however, was a thriving market in what Jarves and others termed “bric-a-brac”: the stuff of amateurs who bought and sold for personal taste or modest financial gain. Italians, Jarves observed, understood how to profit off of their artistic heritage by “bringing to the market every salable relic of their past triumphs in art and much sheer rubbish besides, testing their merits solely by

one, and that passion, like love, in its most exalted expression does not represent normality” (Nobili, Gentle Art of Faking, 308). The American Frank Jewett Mather Jr., who observed the art scene in Italy in the early twentieth century, wrote fictionalized accounts in which art collecting was portrayed as a kind of illness or madness, leading to foolish choices and mistakes. Frank Jewett Mather Jr., The Collectors (New York, 1912).

My aim here is not to excuse potentially deceptive practices but to properly historicize and explain them from the perspective of the Italian artists and dealers who, I argue, maintained a very different view of the value and meaning of their nation’s artistic patrimony, a perspective very much shaped by the intense demands placed on the Italian art market.
the caprices and depths of the purses of buyers or their gullibility."50 In addition to the nearly worthless bric-a-brac, there were entirely spurious works, and thus the buyer had to navigate this bountiful terrain with considerable caution. Non-Italian collectors and connoisseurs who traveled to Italy in the nineteenth century all maintained a certain ambivalence about the art market, given reports of unscrupulous practices, yet collectors were enthralled by the seemingly inexhaustible supply of genuine artworks to be found in the young nation. This supply dried up by the dawn of the twentieth century. British art critic William Le Queux declared in the New York Times that objects of even the slightest value had disappeared from Italy sometime in the 1880s; after that, there was nothing left for sale except forgeries and imitations.51 Le Queux may have exaggerated, but there is evidence to suggest that the supply of available authentic Italian art was limited enough that Italian dealers would travel to other European cities, where they purchased genuine but lesser-known articles in dealers’ shops to replenish their own stock for the next wave of buyers.52

Italians regarded the market for antiquities with caution and ambivalence as well but for dramatically different reasons. What French, British, and American collectors regarded as a great opportunity was evidence to many Italians of the nation’s inability to protect its cultural patrimony. And while non-Italians referred to the antiquities trade as a market, Italians have long maintained that the balance of economic power in this market was fundamentally unequal. As art historian Donata Levi reminds us, “Italy constituted an important part of the market, but only as territory to be conquered or plun-

50 For Jarvis, the market in bric-a-brac was “a sure symptom of a mature civilization gone to seed.” James Jackson Jarvis, Italian Rambles: Studies of Life and Manners in New and Old Italy (London, 1883), 140, 292–93, 289.


52 J. C. Robinson reported on this practice after commenting about an acquisition by the Victoria and Albert Museum of large plaster models of reliefs by Giovanni di Bologna. These pieces were genuine but languished in a London antique shop until they were purchased by an Italian dealer for 20 pounds and taken back to Florence where they were sold to a British buyer for 300 pounds. The Victoria and Albert Museum later acquired them for 472 pounds. As Robinson comments, “This is now a days quite a common occurrence. For many years past, Italy being entirely exhausted and demanded of works of art for sale, the Italian dealers come over to Paris and London to replenish their stock, buy up all kinds of inferior low priced works of Italian art, such as English collectors will not buy at any price in their own country, take them back to Italy, invent all sorts of lying pedigrees and stories to enhance the interest of their merchandise and finally resell them at exorbitant rates to the very same credulous Englishmen, who, when they are abroad in their travels, find everything ‘couleur de rose’ and wonderful.” Letter dated March 22, 1880, from J. C. Robinson to Phillip Owen, South Kensington Museum, nominal file, Austen, F., MA/1/AA124, Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, Victoria and Albert Museum Registry.
dered; the loss and alienation of artistic treasures and the sale of Italian collections to foreigners were the order of the day.\textsuperscript{53} The modern sack of Italy was the result of external market pressures and a series of domestic setbacks with regard to cultural policy. For the new nation (declared in 1861), the task at hand was not to create an artistic patrimony or heritage but to locate, categorize, and protect existing art, antiquities, and architecture. For the first thirty years after unification, however, Italy’s arts administration was poorly funded and understaffed. The nation’s museum network was also in disarray, with most of the nation’s museums under the bureaucratic control of the Ministry of Public Instruction.\textsuperscript{54} For much of the nineteenth century, Italian arts administrators fought an uphill battle to determine the extent of Italy’s artistic inventory and to contain this work within national boundaries. Although art appreciation among the Italian public increased between 1880 and 1900 (as evidenced by publications, shows, and efforts to start public and private collections), the directorate general of antiquities and fine arts found little legal or financial support for the tasks of cataloging and preserving the nation’s artistic heritage.\textsuperscript{55}

Not surprisingly, the decades after Unification witnessed a powerful surge in what could be termed aesthetic patriotism: Italian connoisseurs and art historians, men such as Giovanni Morelli and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, worried that Italy’s patrimony would disappear into the halls of foreign museums and private collections.\textsuperscript{56} Art historians and artists expressed their

\textsuperscript{53} Donata Levi, Cavalcaselle: Il pioniere della conservazione dell’arte Italiana (Turin, 1988), xxviii–xxix. See also De Marchi, Falsi primitivi, esp. 80–82.

\textsuperscript{54} Because he understood that the Italian government lacked sufficient funds for rigorous oversight, art historian Giovanni Cavalcaselle tried to find ways to prevent valuable art from leaving Italy, including a Fine Arts Inspection Agency and a private society for art lovers, which would assist local municipalities. G. B. Cavalcaselle, Sulla conservazione dei monumenti e oggetti di belle arti (Florence, 1870), 5–6 and 11–12. On efforts by Cavalcaselle and others to protect Italian art, see Andrea Emiliani, “Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle Politico: La conoscenza, la tutela e la politica dell’arte negli anni dell’unificazione Italiana,” in Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, conoscitore e conservatore: Atti del convegno, ed. Anna Chiara Tommasi (Venice, 1998), 323–69. On the history of arts administration in Italy, see Matteo Musacchio’s introduction to L’archivio della Direzione Generale delle antichità e belle arti 1860–1890 (Rome, 1994).

\textsuperscript{55} Archival holdings at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti, 1860–90, provide abundant evidence to suggest that, although many concerned citizens complained about the inefficient administration and insufficient reach of the ministry, the government simply did not have the funds or manpower to coordinate any police functions or extend its already strained efforts to catalog Italy’s artistic patrimony. On art appreciation in Italy, see Giacomo Agosti, La nascita della storia dell’arte in Italia: Adolfo Venturi; Dal museo all’università 1880–1940 (Venice, 1996).

\textsuperscript{56} Although Giovanni Morelli was a patriot, he was also an art connoisseur who
patriotism by urging the government to protect and conserve existing art, but art dealers and some connoisseurs chafed against government intervention, arguing instead that the international demand for Italian antiquities actually enhanced Italy’s reputation, given that Italian artwork was proudly displayed in so many museums throughout the world. Much of this debate occurred against a backdrop of government inertia, due to the above-mentioned disorganization and lack of funds. Realistically, Italian collectors who needed money had few alternatives to selling to foreigners; Italian museums simply lacked the money to compete with well-funded individuals and museum agents. Some buyers, such as Sir Charles Eastlake (director of the National Gallery of London), respected Italy’s dilemma by showing restraint; others did not. In 1868, for example, Sir Henry Cole (director of South Kensington Museum) proposed to move the entire Arena Chapel in Padua—adorned with frescoes by Giotto—to South Kensington.\footnote{Jaynie Anderson, *Collecting, Connoisseurship, and the Art Market in Risorgimento Italy: Giovanni Morelli’s Letters to Giovanni Melli and Pietro Zavaritt, 1866–1872* (Venice, 1999). On Sir Henry Cole, see ibid., 7; and John Fleming, “Art Dealing and the Risorgimento,” *Burlington Magazine* 115 (1973): 4–16, 9.} Foreign agents and collectors often rationalized their real or intended purchases of valuable works by asserting that Italians neither appreciated nor cared properly for their artistic heritage.\footnote{An excellent example is Bernard Berenson’s letter to the *Times* of London, in which he observes that Italians have a greater appreciation for forgeries, really copies and reproductions, than for their legitimate artistic patrimony (Berenson, “Art Forgeries”). This attitude was echoed in the writings of nineteenth-century Romanics such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, who felt modern Italians had no appreciation of the past. See John Pfordresher, “Beauty ahwart the Darkness: Constructing Florence in Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Writing,” in Fantoni, *Gli Anglo-Americani a Firenze*, 55–77. Italian tourists on the Grand Tour felt similarly: “In short, Italians were unfit to inherit their Classical past, and it was reasonable, indeed necessary, for it to be appropriated by the ‘civilized’ British” (Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour*, 159–60).} Given the fluidity of the market at the time, it would be impossible to determine how many authentic works were removed from Italy in the nineteenth century. Laws governing the removal of valuable art and antiquities were confusing, and export costs were extremely high.\footnote{Italian law was not clear on whether art forgery constituted criminal or civil fraud. From Italy’s Unification to the Fascist period (1922–45), there was an ongoing legal debate about what constituted criminal fraud, and art forgery did not exactly fit the description, although some of the more elaborate schemes to sell imitations or copies could have qualified. Art sales generally were governed by export and customs laws, some of which were quite severe. For example, the Edito Pacca, instituted in 1820 in}
vided incentive to buyers to try to evade both customs duties and the new laws governing art export.\footnote{Edward Perry Warren, who traveled on behalf of museums in Italy in the late nineteenth century, referred to Italians, Romans in particular, as living in a “twilight of moral thought.” Warren himself leaned toward “doing as the Romans do,” and his personal papers contained advice to others not only about bargaining for a good price but also about how to evade customs duties and any new export laws. An edited version of his papers is published as Osbert Burdett and E. H. Goddard, 
\textit{Edward Perry Warren: The Biography of a Connoisseur} (London, 1941).}

Even the wealthiest buyers attempted to avoid the costs associated with exporting valuable art, as evidenced by the Italian government’s monitoring of American tycoon John Pierpont Morgan for suspicious activities when he visited Italy in 1907.\footnote{Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti, Vers. III, Serie II, Busta 229, Fascicolo 462: Affari Generali Diversi, 1881–1907, Sottofascicolo 20: Viaggio in Italia Pierpont Morgan supposizione di acquisti di opera d’arte.}

Morgan was not the only person hoping to find an art bargain in Italy. Buyers of more modest means hoped to take advantage of what was a confusing situation with little government oversight and no consensus regarding a national conservation plan. Inasmuch as buyers hoped to save money, they also hoped to discover something valuable. Given the chaotic state of arts administration in Italy, the possibility of finding an authentic item to take back home was perhaps not all that far-fetched. The desire for “inexpensive authenticity” thus structured the Italian market in such a way as to make forgeries and imitations almost inevitable.\footnote{Thomas Hoving has argued that the urgent desire for authenticity among museum officials led to some sloppy and rash judgments in terms of acquiring pieces to fill museums. Thus, there was an increased risk of obtaining forgeries. It follows logically from this argument that this desire affected the middlemen for forgeries. In their defense, Italian dealers assumed both parties understood that many pieces were created to satisfy these desires, and thus consumers played along accordingly. Clearly this was not the case: witness the furor the Bastianini forgeries created.}

Indeed, forgery was acknowledged as common practice by Italian artists and antiquarians throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\footnote{see, e.g., Italo Mario Palmerini, “Fabbrica di oggetti antichi: Aneddoti, curiosità, spigolature,” \textit{Il Marzocco}, December 1, 1907. 2; Giorgio Batini, \textit{L’antiquario} (Flor-}
acknowledged these same circumstances—confusing laws and poor administrative oversight—when explaining or rationalizing the practice of forgery.

Sometimes deception was unintentional. Perhaps the most common such instances in the nineteenth century involved the mistaken purchase of a pasticcio: a reasonably priced copy of an older work—usually a painting—that had been aged artificially. Foreign buyers were warned time and again that copies or imitations were abundant in post-Risorgimento Italy: a pasticcio “is as a rule produced openly, and acquired in the first instance without any intention of fraud, simply from love of the original, and of the sentiments that surround the object, even though it is known to be not really old.”\textsuperscript{64} Pasticcio was an important component of the Renaissance revival in post-Risorgimento Italy. Artistic tributes to the Renaissance were manifest not only in art objects but also in fashion, domestic interiors, and architecture. Reproductions were manufactured by craftsmen such as Manifattura Ginori, the Cantaglio firm, and the Manifattura di Signa; these objects were produced openly and even stamped on the bottom with the workshop’s seal before being sold in Italy or around the world. Pasticcio was historically specific to the post-Risorgimento era, as opposed to being part of any timeless practice of deception in Italy.\textsuperscript{65} Although it was openly acknowledged by Italian consumers, there was an element of deception involved when artists needed money or if they wanted to test their skill against an unwitting dealer or customer. In these instances, artists or dealers fooled Italians as well as foreigners. Just as Bastianini fooled the Florentine artists Costa and Banti with his bust of Savonarola, the sculptor Giovanni Duprè recalled fooling Italian experts with copies of antique coffers he made in his Florence studio.\textsuperscript{66} Pasticcio became forgery after it had passed through several hands and was purchased in a dealer’s shop, provided that the dealer knew that the object was a copy yet sold it at a price worthy of a Renaissance original.

Of course, some artists practiced intentional deception when they created an object, artificially aged it, and then hid or buried it—presumably for discovery and examination by an expert. The creation of these more specialized works dates back to at least the fifteenth century in Italy, when forgeries were created


\textsuperscript{66} Duprè, \textit{Pensieri sull’arte e ricordi autobiografici}, 76–79.
in order to substantiate philological or archaeological theories. Bastianini certainly experimented with this type of deception with his bust of Savonarola, presumably to fool the experts. Later, several Italian artists, most notably Icilio Federico Joni (1866–1946) and Alceo Dossena (1878–1937), operated sophisticated workshops to produce imitations of art from the past. In both cases, their intention was to fool experts and customers, but they did so for economic, and not academic, reasons.

The details of Joni’s and Dossena’s exploits are recounted in numerous forgery narratives, but considerably less attention has been paid to the intentional deceptions perpetrated by dealers, tour guides, and shopkeepers, all of whom engaged foreign customers in elaborate representations of modern objects as antique. In these instances, the mise-en-scène defining the act of purchase became a significant part of the transaction. For example, frescos were made and then broken into fragments as if they had been torn off walls. These fragments were sold to unsuspecting buyers, and some were offered to museums outside of Italy. In some cases, genuine fragments of antique objects were uncovered, either in the ground or in unused wells, as was the case in 1900 in the town of Orvieto. For years after, artisans fashioned maioliche orvietane—mostly plates and vases—and placed them, sometimes in perfect condition, in the same wells, to be rediscovered in the presence of prospective buyers. Setting the scene for the “discovery” of a genuine antique was commonplace in parts of Italy, as was described by British art critic M. H. Spielmann:

Innocent peasant-looking people dig up these antiques before the eyes of the unsuspecting tripper, exclaim about them as a great find, but as they do not want to deliver them up to the Government, as a secret of terrific importance the man with the spade gradually conveys to the tripper his readiness to part with them for a certain sum; and the astonished and delighted spectator, who was actually present at the discovery, falls an easy victim, big with satisfaction at his find! And when the fool goes off with his folly, the simple, guileless peasant quietly buries another example of the same object in the same hole for the benefit of the next tourist who may come along.

Although non-Italian experts tried to warn prospective buyers of the dangers lurking in the Italian antiquities trade, the frequency with which these warnings were published indicates that deceptive practices continued as long as there were willing customers.

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68 If the records kept by the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive are any indication, South Kensington Museum officials were frequently solicited by Italian and British collectors and dealers regarding fragments of frescos, tiles, vases, and other objects.
69 Batini, L’amilquario, 114.
Scenarios such as the one described above took time and effort. More common were the scenes that transpired in dealers’ shops and played on the individual buyer’s egotism as well as his sense of international rivalry. Tour guides would bring prospective buyers into the shop: at some point in the visit, the buyer would see a prominently displayed piece that had been recently “restored.” Depending on the personality and nationality of the buyer, the tour guide and dealer would work together to create a scenario in which the art object was promised to an ignorant and unappreciative customer, built up as a potential rival to the buyer in the shop. For example, if the buyer were British, he would be told that the painting in question was promised to an American. Days later, the disappointed buyer would be contacted by the dealer and informed that the previously made deal was off and that the object was now available. In this scenario, the buyer would be influenced not by the discovery of an antique but by the thrill of the imaginary conquest of potential rivals. As early as 1857, these practices were described by foreign observers who marveled at the variety of techniques targeting the individual buyer’s knowledge of art, level of interest, and socioeconomic standing.71 As the market for Italian objects became more complex, Italians responded with considerable sophistication in an attempt to take advantage of the intense demand. Such practices, manifest in the arts of producing, marketing, and selling antiquities, may have originated a century earlier, but they became more widespread and commonly acknowledged by Italian artists, dealers, and connoisseurs.

It seems clear that Italian dealers and artists understood the emotional needs of foreign buyers, whether the need was for authentic discovery or competitive conquest. Those who wrote about the market at this time were quite open about the practices of forgery and misrepresentation. For them, the art market was, above all, a business in which the task at hand was to make the customer happy. Thus, from the Italian perspective, they were making an effort to bring some rationality to an otherwise irrational experience. Reflecting on the market of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Italian art critic Italo Palmarini likened the art market to any other: when you run out of a commodity—sugar, wheat, sculpture—you find it elsewhere. In the case of the Italian art market, artists and dealers simply manufactured more when the supply of antiquities ran low. In so doing, “the antiquarian accomplishes a task that is ultimately humanitarian or almost social in that, on the one hand, it encourages the love of art, ennobling even the roughest spirit; and on the other

71 Some of these practices were recounted at midcentury in “European Manufacture of ‘Old Masters’ for the American Market,” New York Daily Times, August 11, 1857.

2. Antiquarian Luigi Bellini recalled that American customers in particular enjoyed stories (some fabricated) about the origins of the object they purchased. Luigi Bellini, Nel mondo degli antiquari, 2nd ed. (Florence. 1947), 45.
hand it brings much-needed foreign currency into our country." It may sound

tongue in cheek, but Palmarini’s defense of antiquarians and art dealers was

both sincere and typical. Italian participants in the art market understood who

possessed the money to keep the antiquities trade going, although many

balked at the bargain-hunting mentality of even the wealthiest customers.

Indeed, Italian dealers maintained that foreign buyers were not as innocent as

they claimed: they smuggled valuable art out of Italy illegally, or they resorted
to doctoring objects to make them look like poorly done, and therefore

worthless, restorations. Surely, some dealers argued, foreign customers bore

some of the blame for the market in forgeries and imitations. If an Italian
dealer sells a presumably genuine Donatello to a tourist for 5,000 lire and the

tourist thinks he is getting a sculpture that is actually worth 500,000 lire, who

is being dishonest? Hints that foreign customers were knowing participants

in spurious deals could have been a way to assuage the guilty consciences

of Italian artists and dealers, but they were also a way to come to terms with a

market structured around such highly subjective principles as beauty and
desire. Yet many of the published comments of Italian art dealers reflected a

certain pragmatism about the art market in that the bottom line was usually

financial. Italian dealers frequently complained that the majority of foreign

customers wanted antiques but did not want to pay very much for them. Thus,

some antiquarians reasoned, there was nothing wrong with acquiring a mod-

ern work from an artist and selling it for a modest profit. It was unethical,

however, to purchase a modern work and sell it at an astronomical profit.

Clearly, the practices outlined above were intended to deceive the buyer.

They constituted a parallel art market that facilitated the production and sale

of copies, imitations, and poor restorations, not only to satisfy the growing

demand for Italian antiquities but also to satisfy the desires of foreign cus-
momers, many of whom still wanted to find a previously undiscovered treasure,
even as late as the twentieth century. The practice of forgery was more than

a way to become wealthy or to demonstrate one’s skill or cleverness; it

constituted a logical response to the demand for all things authentically

Italian. I say “authentically” because the point of purchase or the place of
discovery mattered: it had to be Italy. Perhaps place mattered because of the

influence of tourism and the emphasis that foreigners placed on experiencing

72 Palmarini, “Fabbrica di oggetti antichi,” 2.

73 See, e.g., the writings of Edward Perry Warren, who traveled throughout Italy

buying pieces for museums. Letters excerpted in Burdett and Goddard, Edward Perry

Warren, 170–71. Art smuggling involved all sorts of subterfuge, including smuggling

works out in coffins and hiding them behind essentially worthless paintings.

74 “Americanate,” L’Antiquario 1, no. 4 (July 1908): 30.

75 This is the observation of Luigi Bellini, who wrote memoirs about his years as an

antiquarian in the early twentieth century. Nel mondo degli antiquari.
Italy as a conduit to the past. Inasmuch as unscrupulous tour guides and dealers sold forgeries to unsuspecting buyers, they reinforced the buyer’s image of Italy as a bountiful source of valuable antiquities. Thus, to sell antiquities, real or fake, was to sell the representation of Italy as the site of an emotional discovery of an authentic artistic object or a fragment from history. Under these circumstances, then, forgery is not necessarily excusable, but it should be more correctly understood as a reaction to the colonial enterprises of tourism and art collecting within Italy.

The ongoing commentary about the presence of forgery within the art market of nineteenth-century Italy reveals the power struggle that occurred in the absence of any national art policy or centralized control over the market. Instead, Italian artists and dealers attempted to manipulate a very complex structure of demand to make it work to their advantage. While some individual artists and dealers were able to make modest or considerable profits, Italians in general were stereotyped as deceptive forgers, and Italy garnered the reputation of being an exploitable resource that individuals and nations could use to appropriate the past through art. This reputation continues through the present day, given recent scandals over the illegal export and purchase of antiquities by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Getty Museum. Despite more governmental control over the country’s cultural patrimony, the fact remains that Italy’s artistic riches overwhelm available government resources; enforcement of stricter laws and controls is inadequate, as are funds for the restoration or preservation of artwork. Ironically, it is perhaps for the best that most of Bastianini’s forgeries reside in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, given the lack of resources for the care and maintenance of modern (nineteenth- and twentieth-century) works in Italian museums.

CONCLUSION

Riccardo Nobili, who wrote extensively on Italian forgery in 1922, observed that “moral considerations apart, the faker of objects for collections is far more interesting a personage than some of his duped victims.” Of course, Nobili meant that the biographical details and personal motives of the forger were—and still are—far more interesting than the details surrounding the victims of forgery. For the purposes of this article, however, Nobili’s observation still rings true in that the motives behind Italian deceptions reveal much about the nature of the Italian art market as it was constituted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An analysis of deceptive practices within that market reveals much about foreign expectations of Italy and Italian antiqui-

76 Nobili, Gentle Art of Faking, 194.
ties, the origins of the stereotyping of Italians as dishonest, and the shifting power relations between customers on the one hand and artists and dealers on the other. Most important, perhaps, excavating these potential and real deceptive practices challenges our assumptions about how and why art forgery happens. Here, the individual artist's motive mattered less than the pressing demand for inexpensive Italian antiquities or the ways in which Italians structured their market around the desire for an authentic experience of discovery or purchase.

In the case of the discovery of the Benivieni bust as a work of recent origin, we see that Bastianini's motives played only a minimal role in the controversy that followed the revelation of the work's provenance. Immediately after the discovery, in 1867, Bastianini admitted he created the bust but claimed that he made it as a copy, with no intent to deceive but to pay tribute to the art of the Renaissance. Accusations of deception leveled by the French were one way to address the uncertainties of the art market, which failed to protect such an august institution as the Louvre from displaying contemporary work as authentic Renaissance art. What matters more than individual motive, then, is the context in which the authenticity of the Benivieni bust was debated. At first, French critics and artists felt empowered to define the bust as authentic, but in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, they defined the bust as a deception, an imitation, but not as art. In the decades and century that followed the debate, art historians and critics have come to use the term "forgery" to describe the bust, largely ignoring the original context of wounded national pride as well as the possibility that Bastianini created the bust as a work of pasticcio. Similarly, they have labeled Bastianini a proficient copyist or a mediocre fraud but not an artist. Italian forgers who followed Bastianini were criticized even more harshly for their misguided attempts to fool the art world. Thus, according to art historians such as John Pope-Hennessy or Max Friedlander, the true genius of Italian art was to be found in Italy's past but not at the time of Bastianini's infamous forgeries. Put simply, according to art experts, if Italy had been emptied of antiquities in the nineteenth century, it was emptied of artistic talent centuries ago. Thus, debates and commentary on forgery sought to humiliate or at least criticize Italians for possessing the technical skills of imitation and using them to trick others. In so doing, art critics and foreign observers reified the Italian reputation for deception and forgery, constructing Italians as technically gifted but artistically challenged and non-Italians as their unknowing victims.