



Elmyr de Hory (1906–1976), *Portrait of a Woman*, in the style of Amedeo Modigliani, c.1975, oil on canvas, 21 x 14 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy



Elmyr de Hory, creating a drawing with figures in the style of Modigliani, Picasso, and Matisse, photographed by Pierre Boulat for a February 6, 1970 *Life Magazine* article, at de Hory's villa La Falaise, Ibiza



Elmyr de Hory and Mark Forgy, photographed c.1971 on Ibiza by de Hory's lawyer Arnold Weisberger

## The Forger's Apprentice: Life with the World's Most Notorious Artist

**MARK FORGY**, longtime friend and confidante of **ELMYR DE HORY**, the most prolific and successful art faker of the twentieth century, and author of the forthcoming memoir, ***THE FORGER'S APPRENTICE: LIFE WITH THE WORLD'S MOST NOTORIOUS ARTIST***, is sharing new insights and secrets of the man who turned the art world upside down.

In conjunction with the well-received exhibition **ELMYR DE HORY, ARTIST and FAKER** at the **HILLSTROM MUSEUM of ART** at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, Mark Forgy spoke to an overflow crowd at **WALLENBERG AUDITORIUM**. Audience reaction described his talk as “spellbinding . . . funny . . . endearing . . . knowledgeable.”

More information about Mr. Forgy and his story can be seen online at these links:

[www.startribune.com](http://www.startribune.com) (3-14-2010)

<http://www.startribune.com/entertainment/art/87403012.html?elr=KArksUUUoDEy3LGDio7aiU>

[www.mankatofreepress.com](http://www.mankatofreepress.com) (2-27-2010)

<http://mankatofreepress.com/features/x1004928258/Exhibition-celebrates-life-work-of-art-forger>

[www.elmyr.net](http://www.elmyr.net)

Elmyr continues to fascinate.

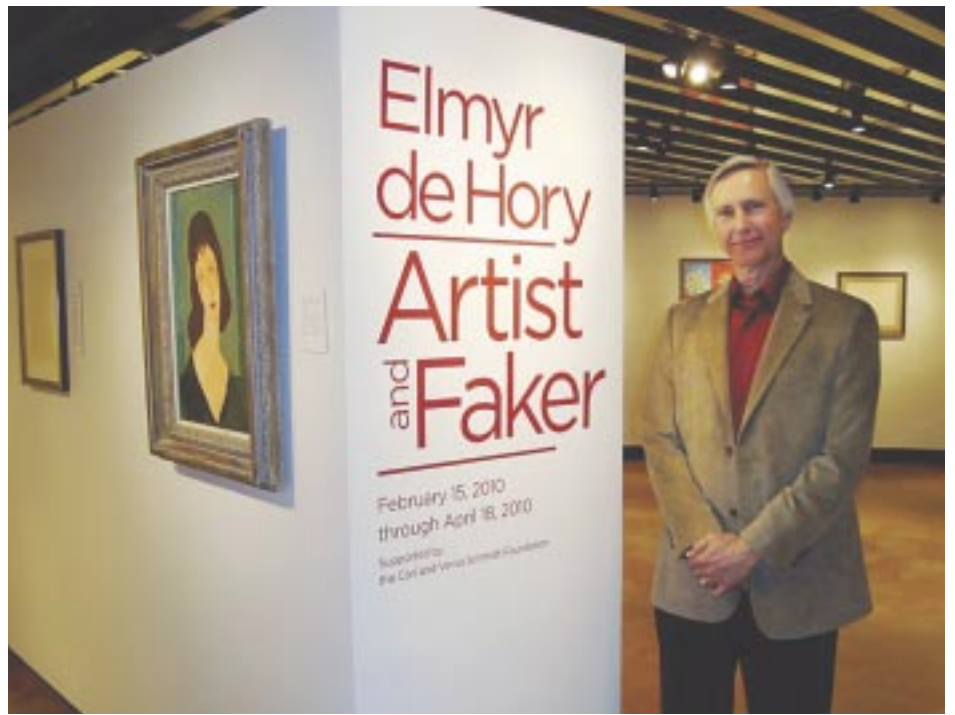
Mr. Forgy's lecture: **Elmyr de Hory: the Man, the Myth, the Artist** is an entertaining revelation, not just for art lovers, but anyone who loves a good story.

**Mr. Forgy is available for public lecture**, and the Hillstrom Museum of Art exhibition *Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker* is also available for display at additional venues (in full or abbreviated versions).

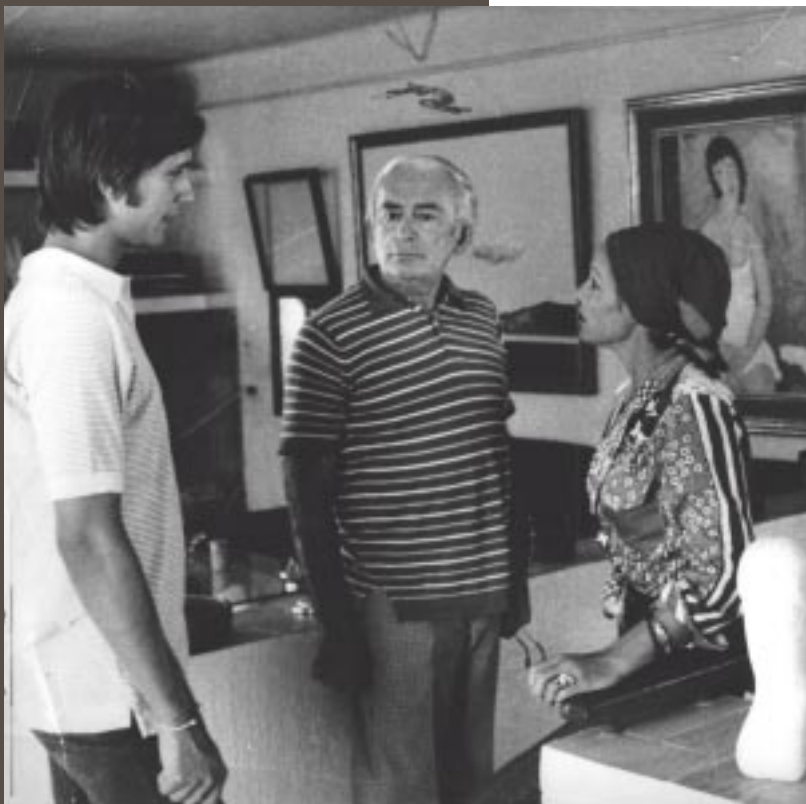
Mr. Forgy may be contacted at [mforgy@bevcomm.net](mailto:mforgy@bevcomm.net), and Donald Myers, Director of the Hillstrom Museum of Art, may be contacted at [dmyers@gustavus.edu](mailto:dmyers@gustavus.edu).



Mark Forgy, presenting his lecture, **Elmyr de Hory: the Man, the Myth, the Artist**



Mark Forgy at the Hillstrom Museum of Art's exhibition, *Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker*



Elmyr de Hory with Ursula Andress and Mark Forgy, photographed c.1970 at de Hory's villa La Falaise, Ibiza



Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), *Portrait of Mark*, 1969, oil on canvas, 22 ½ x 18 ½ inches, Collection of Mark Forgy



Hillstrom Museum of Art

# Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker

February 15 through April 18, 2010 | **Opening Reception** February 15, 7 to 9 p.m.



Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), *Matisse Odalisque*, c.1973, oil on canvas, 19 x 24 inches, Collection of Mark Forgy

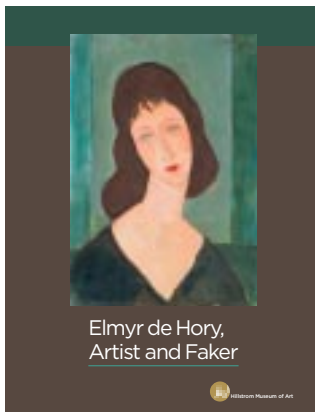
This exhibition features works by one of the most notorious art fakers of modern times, Elmyr de Hory, who is believed to have created hundreds of fakes of modern masters such as Henri Matisse (1869-1954) or Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920) that were accepted into in museums and prominent collections in the U.S. and abroad. Mark Forgy, who formed a close friendship with de Hory in the final years of his life, will lend works that the artist gave or bequeathed to him. Some of these were done in the style of other artists but signed with de Hory's own name, while others were in the artist's own style.

Forgy is collaborating with filmmaker Jeff Oppenheim to create a documentary on de Hory, who has been the subject of earlier significant biographies that include a 1969 study titled *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*, written by Clifford Irving (just before his own forgery, the spurious biography of Howard Hughes). Film studies on de Hory include Orson Welles' *F for Fake* (1972), a BBC documentary titled *Elmyr, the True Picture?* (1970), and a recent film

by Norwegian Knut Jorfald titled *Masterpiece or Forgery? The Story of Elmyr de Hory* (1997).

In addition to over seventy paintings, drawings and prints by de Hory from Forgy's collection, the exhibition will also include genuine works by some of the artists de Hory frequently forged, lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, plus a fake Matisse from the collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum (to which it was donated in 1970 as a fake by Elmyr de Hory, for the purpose of study).

*This exhibition is supported by a generous grant from the Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation.*



Elmyr de Hory,  
[Artist and Faker](#)

Click for a link to the exhibition catalog PDF.

**Mr. Forgy is available for public lecture**, and the Hillstrom Museum of Art exhibition *Elmyr de Hory, Artist and Faker* is also available for display at additional venues (in full or abbreviated versions). Mr. Forgy may be contacted at [mforgy@bevcomm.net](mailto:mforgy@bevcomm.net), and Donald Myers, Director of the Hillstrom Museum of Art, may be contacted at [dmyers@gustavus.edu](mailto:dmyers@gustavus.edu).

[gustavus.edu/finearts/hillstrom](http://gustavus.edu/finearts/hillstrom)

Events are free and open to the public.  
Regular Museum Hours:

9 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays,  
1-5 p.m. weekends

Hillstrom Museum of Art  
800 West College Avenue  
St. Peter, MN 56082

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FROM MARK FORGY'S FORTHCOMING MEMOIR

## The Forger's Apprentice: Life with the World's Most Notorious Artist

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### Meeting Prosky

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While it would have been easy to dismiss Prosky as an archetypal thug, I tried to avoid that impulse of first impressions, one my friend, Elmyr, indulged with a nonchalance he learned from a lifetime of habit. I wanted to be more generous in my assessment of others. Still, it was hard not to notice that Prosky's nose had been at odds with others' points of view more than once I imagined, and how his early-man features stretched over Bigfoot's chassis. Underneath his black leather jacket and open-collared shirt shocks of chest hair intertwined with gold chains. A neat shave line encircled the base of his neck where the forest began. It was true; he possessed the coarseness of a wood rasp but he and Elmyr shared an interest in art, money, and...both were Hungarian. Moreover, Prosky could sell you cold dishwasher and make you feel good about it.

One day I glimpsed his black Mercedes convertible with its red leather seats from the second-floor window of Elmyr's home. A talc of off-road dust dulled the car's sheen. He parked in the shade of the house, got out and walked up the stone steps to the front door. The steel doorknocker announced his unexpected call. Again, he left his six-year old daughter and Doberman pincer in the car "in case the dog got hungry," Elmyr quipped.

On this occasion, Prosky brought him an auction catalog from Sotheby's in Geneva. Inside, he proudly pointed out a painting featured in its sale of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, a scene of Nice in southern France. Palm trees lined its harbor and street-lamped promenade, swaths of pinks, blues and greens were backdrops for people, buildings, and horse-drawn carriages. What was unusual about this painting was the signature in the lower right hand corner of the canvas. Elmyr and I examined the reproduced picture and instantly recognized it as one he had done a few months before. Only now, it bore the name of the French artist, Raoul Dufy, not Elmyr.

For more than twenty years, Elmyr made a career of creating fake masterpieces, not only Dufys but also many better-known Impressionist and Postimpressionist artists. His long trail of chicanery earned him the title of the "world's greatest art forger," a label that always made him wince, as he believed it demeaned his dignity. However, the specter of those years and evading the consequences of his illegal activities still troubled him. Every knock at the door might be an Interpol agent and a moment of reckoning. Furthermore, he was weary of constantly looking over his shoulder to see if a Damocles sword was waiting to fall. Now, he was trying to emancipate himself from his past and establish a reputation as a fine artist in his own right, but Prosky, among others, was more interested in passing off his fakes as originals . . . again. That was where the *big* money was and people knew Elmyr's reputation as an easy mark.

Despite his efforts to sell his own work, people still wanted his Picassos, Matisses, Modiglianis, Renoirs, and others. He also understood the likelihood of others trying to profit from his talent, but did not have the stamina or will to *police* their intentions. I recall how his suntan could not disguise the blood loss in his pallor that afternoon as he gazed in silent déjà vu at the catalog's Dufy. Its pages trembled in his hands. Prosky remained oblivious of the growing storm in Elmyr's face. Instead, unable to contain his joy, he began moving with the gaiety and weightlessness of a marionette. His little secret burst. "It fetched \$35,000," he chortled.

Visibly upset at the surprise news, Elmyr went off on a tirade in Hungarian. His stiffened forefinger bounced repeatedly off Prosky's sternum, backing up a man whose shadow easily swallowed him. Suddenly, moving with not-seen-before speed, he began frisking Prosky in a ticklish

way, dissolving the steel cable tension into shrieks of playground laughter. Elmyr's hands darted into Prosky's trouser pockets one after the other like a striking serpent, emerging with fists full of cash. Then, pushing him into an easy chair, lifted one of his legs like a professional wrestler, removed his shoe and sock to reveal a neatly folded wad of money, repeating the surprise move with his other leg. Disarmed by Elmyr's feisty slapstick assault, Prosky lay supine in paroxysms of laughter; tears trickled down his cheeks. His naked feet rested on a small table in front of his chair. Their comic ballet ended as abruptly as it began.

The booty from his money-yielding piñata lay on the floor, Swedish kroner, dollars, and Swiss francs. Collecting them on his hands and knees did little to salvage Elmyr's dignity, but the glint in his eyes signaled his triumph. No matter how long removed from the sandbox antics of these two men, the memory remains imperishable. At the time, I didn't know if this spectacle was typical of gypsy bargaining techniques, but, happily, it became an entertaining ritual each time they did business. Fernand Legros, Elmyr's former dealer, had not acted as brazenly as

Prosky had, saying to his face, in essence, "See, I can exploit you and there is nothing you can do about it."

My life by this time had evolved into an otherworldly existence that often seemed LSD-inspired for its strangeness. I know the sort of dance of the two silverbacks I witnessed that afternoon would never occur in Minnesota. Outrageous behavior like that would be grist for Sunday's sermon and community indignation. However, this small island of Ibiza was a universe away from my uneventful life in the Midwest. I could only imagine my family's saucer-eyed shock. My parents thought modesty an admirable virtue. "Don't draw attention to yourself," was a familiar admonishment at home. In Elmyr's world modesty had its place, say, reposing in a casket. In his mind, it was a vapid attribute, like the word "nice," which I quickly dropped from my vocabulary to this day after using it to describe someone. I discovered at once it was an ill chosen modifier. Elmyr looked annoyed, shooting back, "What do you mean, nice? He wouldn't pee on your dining room table?" An image forever linked to that word. His response was less a rebuff than realigning my view of a world order, one that conformed more to his oft-repeated adage, "kalt odor heiss, aber nicht warm" (cold or hot but not warm) meaning he had little tolerance for anything in half-measure. "Nice" was therefore tepid and uninteresting.

It was clearer to Elmyr than to me that the job he offered me keeping his garden weed-free, swimming pool clean and helping with his correspondence in English, was migrating into other areas I hadn't anticipated. Elmyr was becoming my mentor, before I knew what a mentor was. I only later realized his willingness to provide an open door to an unknown world carried with it other expectations.

One evening, we sat in his café au lait-leather chairs reading. Beethoven's triple piano concerto accompanied our winter night ritual. Knurly olive wood burned on the stone hearth fireplace behind us. A furrowed "v" above the bridge of his nose signaled the gravity of his thoughts. "Is something bothering you?" I asked. He was reading a biography of one of his favorite painters, Caravaggio, a brawling, precocious genius with an unerring compass for finding trouble. The sway between success and sorrow was a persistent pattern in Elmyr's own life. The tribulations of the great artist and inventor of the dramatic use of light and dark called *chiaroscuro*, possibly dredged up memories he tried to suppress. Elmyr, like Caravaggio, had been a fugitive from the law, his talent underappreciated, at odds with prevailing tastes, and forced to bear the risks of being homosexual. "This is disturbing. His life was so hard," he breathed with the spent energy of a marathoner. Neither artist was a stranger to poor choices and their lamentable consequences. Elmyr was about to share with me one mistake that changed his life.

"I appreciate your help around here, and your company. I'm glad you're interested in other things, not hanging out at the bars, and that you want to learn about art and languages." (He enrolled me for private French lessons at the Alliance Française.) He continued, "You also know about my past and my association with Fernand Legros. I know there is nothing he would like better than to see me dead." This made sense as no one else could incriminate Legros as Elmyr could, knowing he personally handed off hundreds of his artworks to his ex-partner. These were secrets he would rather see Elmyr take to the grave.

I then began to grasp the drift of our evening's chat. My role was expanding in my unsuspecting eyes. Beyond chauffeuring, garden and pool chores, and secretarial duties, it seemed

my job description would now include . . . bodyguard! He may have thought my presence as a witness was deterrent enough to thwart any assassination attempt on his life, although the logic of this rationale remained elusive. If Elmyr were in harm's way, I could offer the resistance of a turnstile. This was a leap of misplaced confidence since any snarling lap dog would back in down in a fight. Given my willowy physique, most observers would probably mistake me for one of those underfed, melon-eyed urchins on the verge of tears, immortalized on velvet by equally famished artists. Visions wallpapered my imagination of some baboon-jawed thug with a finger's breadth between his eyebrows and hairline repeatedly smacking a tire iron into his other hand. Despite a mental picture of our lifeless bodies stuffed in a steamer trunk, my fondness for him made me sputter a palliative, "I'll do whatever I can to help."

This morbid notion of our gangland-style murders was a striking contrast to the life I had come to accept as normal. For me, it was an enchanted existence in his hilltop villa, La Falaise. Nor could I see any signs of the danger he feared that evening. To the contrary, he appeared enveloped in adulation from friends, a bad-boy media darling in the world's press, and newly conferred folk hero and giant killer for exposing the fallibility of art experts.

On the other hand, their embarrassment still glowed red. This was apparent from an article about Elmyr appearing in *Life* magazine early in 1970. *Life's* Paris bureau chief, Rudolph Chelminski, came to interview Elmyr. During his three-day visit, he and Elmyr seemed to establish an immediate rapport. Within two weeks of Chelminski's departure, he sent Elmyr a draft of his article. It was a sympathetic view of the artist. When it appeared in print, its tone was substantially different, calling him a "dilettante." Rudy wrote him an apology, stating he couldn't account for the changes but would find out why it bore no semblance to the one he submitted. Elmyr later discovered it went to one of the senior editors of the magazine who was connected to the Annenbourg family of Philadelphia. Their art collection and reputation epitomized those deeply rooted interests that could not support any praise of a man they viewed as the anti-Christ. Therefore, it was as counter intuitive for anyone with stakes in the art establishment to say anything complimentary about Elmyr as it would be to throw salt in an open wound.

Despite Elmyr's yearning for approval, he knew he would always have his detractors. Nonetheless, this backlash possessed a sting. Still, it amused him to be riding a swell of notoriety. Since his history was now out in the open, he thought, perhaps his life of stealth and deception was finally past. People wanted to meet this "famously infamous" man, as he newly described himself, always with a smile and ring of irony.

The pace of entertaining at La Falaise accelerated and he reveled in the attention of those around him. I better understood Elmyr's whirling social life was as essential as oxygen to him, and that it also had as much to do with his aversion to being alone as it had with his naturally friendly disposition. I came to believe that my company and that of others was his remedy for the sense of abandonment that plagued him from childhood. He made no distinction between solitude and loneliness. Either one left him unplugged, feeling isolated. When I went to visit friends, his face assumed the look of a child lost at the mall. I knew this ever-present need for companionship was the portal that allowed me into his world, but that it also dismantled his judgment filter that allows one a self-preservation instinct. The absence of this defense mechanism let the barbarians through the gate at will and I could not always protect him from repeated pillaging of his unwary nature. How did he remain impenetrable to the lessons of misplaced trust? Furthermore, how could a man be guileless and consistently cunning enough to fool others at the same time? These contradictions made this new father figure in my life a daily source of wonder and endearment. I came to believe those close to him, whose friendships he clutched with a terrier-like tenacity, were the reward of others who simply loved him.

In many ways it felt like an out-of-body experience to simultaneously participate in and witness this conscientiousness-raising transformation in me. Elmyr became my guru overseeing my education. He found an eager pupil in me, ready to accept his tutelage and absorb the knowledge that seemed to gush from him like a severed artery. I often felt like the sorcerer's apprentice, attending a private academy, privy to arcane bits of information whose usefulness or purpose were not immediately apparent but would give me the social graces of aristocrats. It was, after all, this rarefied world of the landed gentry in which he demonstrated an obsessive interest and claimed his own genesis. Furthermore, his skill at negotiating the thinnest limbs of obscure family trees with the deftness of a ring-tailed lemur was mystifying. Pointing out the significance of incestuous alliances,

marriages, and titles of people I had never heard of or cared to, he imparted as though it were as crucial and fundamental as learning the alphabet.

I recall standing before Rafael's portrait of Pope Julius II in London's National Gallery with Elmyr expounding on the painterly qualities of the picture. His enthusiasm then seemed to increase as he explained the sitter's genealogical connection to friends of his. "Julius the second was a Della Rovere, duke of Urbino." He continued, "The Della Rovere family actually produced two popes, Sixtus IV who had the Sistine Chapel built and then his nephew, Julius II who commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling . . ." History, art, literature, everything had its place on a living tapestry and he loved knowing how all the threads were connected. Then, this was part of his past and now part of my present.

Stories flowed endlessly. He shared his adventures and hardships. I marveled at his endurance. From the comfort of those leather easy chairs his life unfolded before me, narrated in Alistair Cooke erudition for his audience of one. Lest I lend some mythic proportion to his anecdotes, he was quick to dismiss this inclination. I once said in response to his tale, "You're so wise." He shrugged, adding, "If that were true I wouldn't have made so many stupid mistakes." Unfortunately, the clarity of hindsight had a short shelf life.

Entering La Falaise was much more than a cultural sanctuary. It was the School of Elmyr. There, he imparted to me the love a father shows a son, a bond and depth of commitment I never knew with my own father. He taught me that relationships were the foundation of true happiness. Consequently, the love and trust he invested in others were his greatest source of validation and vulnerability. While he provided me a safe harbor, an eagerness to give me a unique education, I became his sentinel, wanting to protect him from those who might take advantage of him. Somehow, I eased into my role as guardian, not in the daunting way of some no-neck bouncer, but more the ear-whispering counselor simply because I could spot the sharks' fins puncture the water's surface before he did. It was odd, an unlikely responsibility for a twenty-year-old from the Midwest to advise someone worldly, a couple generations removed from me. The difference, I think, was that he came to rely on my "observer's" perspective. Moreover, experience showed him that sound judgment did not come easily to him and the insights of his own self-awareness were of limited value.

In retrospect, the odder life became in Elmyr's world, the more normal it seemed.

My own evolution resulted from his showering influence on me. It was most apparent when I returned to the States after living in Europe for a year. I wore ascots, talked about wine, dropped names unknown to most. My friends viewed me as they would a nudist at a Baptist bible camp, stunned and surprised. They could barely understand my new British accent. The doctrine of Lutheran humility drummed into me in my youth vanished completely. I knew I couldn't remain long in Minnesota. I had to return to the island, breathe the salubrious air of Ibiza and regroup once more with my inner snob. After two weeks, everyone probably awaited my departure with the same relief as the end of a cholera epidemic. To my mind, the reason for the newly noticed disparity between us was simple. They weren't growing and I was. This wasn't true of course but our life paths *were* diverging. It was also remarkable how successful I was in becoming Elmyr's alter ego or oblivious of how well the graft had taken. Twelve months earlier, this metamorphosis was unimaginable.

By the summer of 1969 college was nothing more than my bulletproof vest, giving me a deferment from the draft and going to Vietnam. The previous year saw hope and sanity burn on the funeral pyres of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Chicago's Democratic Convention captured the mood of the country. Tear gas, riot police, batons beating protesters and organized resistance. The country had not been as polarized since the Civil War. By April of '69 more than 33,000 bodies in black zippered bags came home from the Tropic of Hell. I knew I wouldn't let myself be inducted or induced "to just sign up and get it over with" as my father urged me to do. It was an immoral war, indefensible and not winnable, I thought. Drugs and the counter culture carried millions . . . and me in their currents. Rather than going to beautiful Southeast Asia, I elected to go to Europe. ■