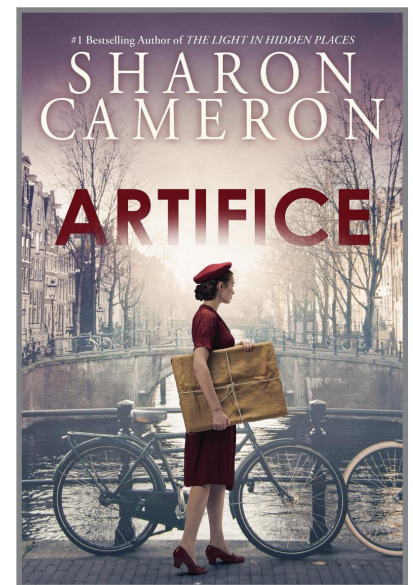


Artifice

AUTHOR

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SCIS: 5470713

ISBN: 9781338813951

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary

SYNOPSIS

Isa de Smit was raised in the vibrant, glittering world of her parents' small art gallery in Amsterdam, a hub of beauty, creativity, and expression, until the Nazi occupation wiped the colour from her city's palette. The 'degenerate' art of the Gallery de Smit is confiscated, the artists in hiding or deported, her best friend, Truus, fled to join the shadowy Dutch resistance. And masterpiece by masterpiece, the Nazis are buying and stealing her country's heritage, feeding the Third Reich's ravenous appetite for culture and art.

So when the unpaid taxes threaten her beloved but empty gallery, Isa decides to make the Nazis pay. She sells them a fake—a Rembrandt copy drawn by her talented father—a sale that sets Isa perilously close to the second most hated class of people in Amsterdam: the collaborators. Isa sells her beautiful forgery to none other than Hitler himself, and on the way to the auction, discovers that Truus is part of a resistance ring to smuggle Jewish babies out of Amsterdam.

But Truus cannot save more children without money. A lot of money. And Isa thinks she knows how to get it. One more forgery, a copy of an exquisite Vermeer, and the Nazis will pay for the rescue of the very children they are trying annihilate. To make the sale, though, Isa will need to learn the art of a master forger, before the children can be deported, and before she can be outed as a collaborator. And she finds an unlikely source to help her do it: the young Nazi soldier, a blackmailer and thief of Dutch art, who now says he wants to desert the German army.

Yet, worth is not always seen from the surface, and a fake can be difficult to spot. Both in art, and in people.

Based on the true stories of Han Van Meegeren, a master art forger who sold fakes to Hermann Goering, and Johann van Hulst, credited with saving 600 Jewish children from death in Amsterdam, Sharon Cameron weaves a gorgeously evocative thriller, simmering with twists, that looks for the forgotten colour of beauty, even in an ugly world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Cameron is the #1 NYT best-selling author of seven award-winning novels, including *The Light Hidden in Places* (2020), *Bluebird* (2021) and her newest book *Artifice*. Sharon's books have won the Parents' Choice Gold Award, the Westchester Fiction Award, the Junior Library Guild's Gold Standard Award, earned starred reviews from Booklist, SLJ, Book Page and Kirkus, and have been chosen for Indie Next Top Ten, YALSA's Best Fiction for Young Adults, Audible Best Books, and numerous state award nominations. *The Light Hidden in Places* was a 2020 Reese Witherspoon Book Club pick and has been sold in 19 countries.

Please visit Sharon at sharoncameronbooks.com, on Instagram [@sharoncameronbooks](https://www.instagram.com/sharoncameronbooks), [facebook.com/sharoncameronbooks](https://www.facebook.com/sharoncameronbooks) and [@CameronSharonE](https://twitter.com/CameronSharonE) on Twitter.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What can you see happening in the cover artwork?
 - Based on the cover art, where and when do you think this book might be set?
 - What important world events do you know of that occurred around the time and place that the book is probably set?
 - Who do you think this book might be about?
 - What types of events would you expect to occur in this book?
 - What does the word artifice mean? Look in a dictionary and as a class, discuss the several different meanings of the word artifice, and which one/s you think might apply to this novel. Having read the novel, revisit this discussion to see if any of your opinions have changed, and if so, why, and in what way?
- Isa enjoys listening to swing music, and at the time it was popular worldwide. Find some swing music from the era (Johnny and Jones if you can find it), and listen to it. While you listen use pastels to create an artwork inspired by the rhythm and melody that you hear.
- Looking at your artwork from the previous activity, think about the palette you have used. How would you describe the different colours, tones and shades that are in your artwork? Think of descriptive and specific colour words to describe at least eight of the different colours you can see. Reread the scene where Isa listens to music and draws with pastels. What words are used to describe her artwork? Look at the different colour words that you have used, and create a descriptive sentence using some of them that evokes your artwork.
- Why did the Nazi Occupiers confiscate radios and shut down the Dutch broadcasters?
- How did the Dutch (and other occupied countries) learn about what was happening in the war, with all the radio stations and newspapers closed down or under Nazi control?
- How do you think Isa felt while she was ignoring the note the soldier had left for her? Why do you think she felt this way? Use evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- Having read the entire book, what would you say are the prevailing emotions elicited by this novel? Choose the three emotions/emotional states that you think pervade the novel the most, and for each of the three, find a specific passage or scene exemplifying that stated emotion.
- Look at a box or container of at least a dozen paints, crayons, pencils or pastels which have individually named colours. Write a description of an imaginary artwork using at least eight of the colour names used to label the art supplies.
- Look at surrealist paintings online. How do you think you would have reacted to the 1938 exhibition in Paris if you had visited it when you were 12? Why do you think this? Create a surrealist artwork of your own.
- Why did Hitler try to acquire as much of the valuable art and artefacts from the countries he occupied as possible? What did he do with them? In your opinion, does this apparent desire to possess and control beauty, contradict the clear and undeniable brutality and cruelty of the Nazi regime, or is it a predictable and despicable complement to the horrors that occurred? What do you think Isa's opinion on this topic is? Write a brief analysis of your understanding of Isa's opinions surrounding the Nazi regime, and its predilection for art theft, and how this meshes with the rest of their policies. Use evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- How much would an original Vermeer sell for today? In small groups, research online the current value of some of the better known Vermeer paintings. How does this compare to the money that Isa was paid by the Nazis for her father's forgeries?
- Go online and look at a digital high-resolution collection of Vermeer's artwork. (You can visit the website mentioned in the Author's notes at the end of the book.) What is your emotional response to this artwork? Reread the sections where Isa is discussing her response to Vermeer's work, and compare it to yours. How and why do you think your response differs?

- Visit a gallery or museum to view an art collection. On returning to class, write a recount of your visit. Include in your recount a detailed description of at least one specific artwork, noting your personal reaction to the piece as well as the intricacies of its creation. You can choose an artwork that you like greatly, one that you dislike, or one that you are indifferent to, as long as you specify what your opinion or reaction to it is and what about the artwork has prompted it.
- When Michel first knocks on her door, Isa thought that ‘fear...was like a pool of spreading paint.’ (p 36) Do you agree with this summation? Why/why not and in what ways?
- Throughout the novel as a whole, the author consistently makes use of art-based metaphors and similes to describe what Isa is thinking, feeling and seeing. Think of at least two separate art-themed metaphors or similes of your own, and use them in a descriptive passage sharing a scene, person or event with which you are familiar.
- Isa’s parents turned the main living room in their home into their bedroom. What would you have to do at home to convert your living/lounge/family room into a bedroom? How would it impact your daily life if the main common living area in your house was a bedroom? Why might it have been an easier thing to do in the old home where Isa lives than in a more modern home?
- When Moshe is taken, Isa packs his things up for when he comes back, because she hadn’t known then that people didn’t come back from the trucks. What other realisations does Isa have over the course of the novel?
- In the epigraphs at the start of the chapters, there are quotes from multiple sets of commandments. In small groups, collate all these epigraphs, and see if you can collect a full, or several full, set/s of commandments. What do they all say and how do they differ from each other? Do you see the Nazi regime as having lived by their commandments? How did they manage to justify their acts of brutality, oppression and inhumanity in light of these commandments?
 - As a class, discuss the dangers to an individual, to an organisation and to a regime, of the rationalisation and self-justification of evil.
- If you were to write ten rules to live by as a decent human being, what would they be and why?
- How hard would it be to forge an artwork? Choose an artwork that you enjoy looking at, and attempt to paint or draw a copy. Once you have finished, as a class, discuss this experience and the extent of the artistry that must be required to successfully paint a forgery, then age it as well.
- Isa consistently looks at people or scenes, and thinks of how she would title her view were it an artwork. In pairs or small groups, go through the camera rolls on your phones, and choose at least three images to title with an emotion in the way Isa titles her views of Michel’s face as Pain and Fear.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

RAE CARLYLE