



DECEPTIONS

discussion questions

1 *Deceptions* and its heroine delve into the murky world of art fraud and theft. A famous stolen painting is often in the headlines but stories of the business of fake or forged paintings going the other way — into museums and galleries — seems to get less attention, even though it is estimated that 20% of collections could be fake. Did you know of this before you read this book? Has it intrigued you to learn more?

2 One of the treats in *Deceptions* is the discussion about the difference between fakes, forgeries, and copies. The painter making a fake is actually creating an original work using a famous painter's style, as opposed to a forgery that recreates a known work. Why do we see this as having less value? Why do you think we attach so much significance to a famous name? Do you think our society's reliance on experts has made us mistrust our own responses to art? Should art have the equivalent of wine's blind tastings?

3 In *Deceptions*, Anna Porter plays with many facets of female identity and agency, from her delightfully over-the-top heroine, Helena Marsh, to the long-underrated artist Artemisia Gentileschi to the femme fatale spouse Mrs. Vaszary. In doing this, she upends the macho traditions of the thriller and heist genres. Have you read other books where the lead characters are women taking over traditional male roles? Did you enjoy them? If so, what did you particularly like? What did you like about this aspect of *Deceptions*?

4 Much of what we know about Artemisia's life and background comes from the transcript of her trial. In fact, a lot of what we know about life in times past is a result of trial records from times before newspapers, and when many were illiterate. A lot of what we know about Caravaggio, the other painter featured in the book, also comes from trial records. Another famous case gave us much of what we know about Shakespeare because he was sued for stealing his theatre building board by board when he lost use of the land it was on. What do you think our trial records today would reveal to an archaeologist in the future? Do you think it will reveal our concerns and mores in a different way than all the other media we now have, or do you think it will be irrelevant?

5 Helena's work always seems to bring her face-to-face with the corruption of post-Soviet eastern Europe, particularly Attila's Hungary. It adds great colour to the book, but it also reveals real truths about failing democracy and the rise of kleptocracy in these countries. In doing this, the author is undertaking a bit of genre-busting. Did you enjoy this aspect of the book? If so, what was it that you liked about it?

6 Helena's father, the art forger, put an indelible stamp on Helena's life. It has made her fiercely independent but also mistrustful of men and love; she must always be in control. Until Attila, it seems that she's chosen partners who fit her assessment of men — but Attila seems to break the mold. Do you think they have a chance?

