

SCIENCE . TECHNOLOGY

INSIDE THE MIND OF A CON ARTIST

6 × 52' (ENG, GER)

What happens in the mind of a con artist? What makes their brain so well equipped for psychological trickery? Learn how con artists are tricking you and turn into a profiler of fraudsters.

When we hear 'con artist' we think big. We think of larger-than-life personalities, of slick-talking, fast-moving masters of deception. They hold a deep, enigmatic fascination for us. The crime science series unearths the human truth behind some of the most extraordinary fraud cases in recent history, by psychoanalysing the con artists themselves. We invite six of the most successful con artists of all time to a scientific institute where they are confronted with their crimes. Experts in the fields of forensic psychology, behavioural science, and neuroscience look into the minds of Christophe Rocancourt, Matthew Cox, Frederic Bourdin, Jan Lewandowski, Shaun Greenhalgh and Helmut Kiener, uncovering the unconscious meanings and motivations behind their actions. We look at what makes us so susceptible to being conned and reveal uncomfortable truths about us all.

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1. Frédéric Bourdin

Frédéric Bourdin is a former French serial imposter the press has nicknamed "The Chameleon". One of his most famous cases was when he took the identity of a young boy, named Nicolas Barclay, from Texas who had disappeared in 1994. Although Bourdin had brown eyes and a French accent, he somehow convinced the American authorities as well as the family, that he was their blond and blue-eyed son. Experts manage to take a look inside his mind and reveal the skills of a masterful con artist.

2. Christophe Rocancourt

Christophe Rocancourt is a French impostor and con artist who scammed rich and powerful people by masquerading in turn as a French nobleman, the heir to the Rockefeller family or as a Russian prince. Experts already discover after the initial interviews and tests that Christophe Rocancourt is not to be underestimated. It's through observing Rocancourt and gently pushing his buttons that the three experts are able, each in their own way and through their own expert skill set, to decode Rocancourt's playbook.

3. Helmut Kiener

Helmut Kiener has tricked thousands of private investors and banks, including Barclays, JP Morgan and BNP Paribas, with manipulated funds and life insurance policies out of about €300 million. Experts explore the complicated mind of one of Germany's greatest con artists. His story takes the viewer on a journey from a small town in Eastern Germany to the luxury lifestyle of Palm Beach, Florida and back to a prison near the financial heart of Frankfurt, Germany. Kiener makes a real effort to convince the experts that his actions were all a matter of coincidence. But they know there is much more behind the exterior of this 'friendly uncle'. By analyzing Kiener's behaviour, his words and his brain, a completely different picture emerges.

4. Jan Lewan

Jan Lewandowski, known professionally as Jan Lewan, is a Polish-American songwriter and polka band leader. Lewan's financial crimes were described as a "classic Ponzi scheme". He is everything you might expect from a guy who is described as flamboyant and gregarious. While he obliges to the testing and the analyzing of the scientists, he posts a post on Facebook in which he divulges his ulterior motives. "Nobody fucks with Jan Lewan." By finally exposing himself, the true nature of the impostor Jan Lewan is revealed.

5. Matthew Cox

Matthew Cox is an American former mortgage broker from Florida who falsified documents to make it appear that he owned properties and then fraudulently obtained several mortgages on them for five to six times their actual worth. More than any other con artist, Cox explains in minute detail how he falsified documents and conned people and banks like Bank of America out of enormous amounts of money. But Cox's apparent honesty has an ulterior purpose: Cox is hiding his motives. It's only when the experts discard Cox's own easy explanation of being a psychopath and probe further in his brain, that they eventually unearth the real motives behind his conning behaviour.

6. Shaun Greenhalgh

Shaun Greenhalgh is a British artist and art forger. Over a seventeen-year period, between 1989 and 2006, he produced a large number of forgeries in a variety of styles. One of his most notable forgeries was a stoneware sculpture thought to be a rare unglazed ceramic sculpture by Paul Gauguin. Greenhalgh presents himself to the experts as a sympathetic, good-hearted and extremely shy man. But when they probe further, a more complex personality comes to light. There is more to the gifted storyteller Shaun Greenhalgh than meets the eye. When his real motives are exposed, slowly Shaun Greenhalgh the con artist is revealed.