

SHANGHAI PEARL MARKET

Thoughts on the painting's originality and the reproduction as a method of art making

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INTRODUCTION

During my MFA I have been imitating different materials that have some sort of cultural value like the granite, marbles and wood grains. By borrowing from the repetitive and standardized realm of crafts, the imitation as method has a central role in my art production. What differentiates craft and fine art is considered to be a dose of uniquely creative imagination. But what now, or historically is this uniqueness? It is almost always still imitation and representation. What distinguishes one piece of contemporary art above another work of art is the content of the ideas.

The works in my current practice create a visual illusions that open up a conceptual split between an appearance of tangibility, of the works mass and feel, and the actual physical objects present. I aim to plays around with the art objects very materiality.

Yet I don't see these painting or sculptures as only physical illustrations of a conceptual idea. They have a physicality and material presence and they have been produced through different means and methods. But an artworks value can be viewed independently of the conceptual idea behind the artworks production, as is the recognition of the work and craft involved in the production. Another aspect that is often undervalued in relation to the conceptual in contemporary art production.

Can painting with all its history, tradition, fetishism and aura surrounding it be dissected into something easy enough for most people to use and share? Is there a need for originality in art when we can reproduce almost everything now through accessible means or even hire someone else to do reproduce it for you?

By incorporating imitation of different materials into my project, I want to question what representation can be and how we value artworks of painted matter.

A Reformulation of the painting's originality perspective on the personal performance (the physical handprint or the conceptual expression) , and then set it against a more collective and mechanical expression during the project period. More or less, I want to question the originality aspect, the fetishism and the myth of painting as a medium.

For this thesis I will write about my own practice and earlier works relating to these issues regarding originality, authorship, image property and imitation and reproductions as method of art making.

During my thesis writing I will be located in Shanghai, China during the first 3 months of 2015 where I will be conducting my own research on the notion of Shanzhai (the art of copying) and explore architecture and the art copying industry and compare it to our western canon on originality and copying. Also I will write about a site-specific project I conducted in Shanghai that involved local Shanghai artists into making collaborative paintings.

The material produced during the project will eventually lead up to my final exam work for my MFA. But even the location of the project in China is of importance, with its leading position on the global economy and the current redistribution of cultural capital between west and east. The key idea is to see the whole visit as a platform for exchanging new ideas and methods. Hopefully there will be an interesting meeting point between me as a Swedish artist and local Chinese artists.



Glitter as Hypnosis (Purple), plaster, spraypaint, pearlescent pigment, pigment flakes, clear coat, 2014

Golden Black Galaxy, oil, pearlescent pigments, flake pigments, epoxy on canvas, 155,5 x 126cm, 2014

Yellow Haze, oil, pearlescent pigments, glitter, Acrystal, epoxy on canvas, epoxy, 107 x 145cm, 2014

artwork by author)

BACKGROUND

I initially started as a painter during my early school years but thought after a while that something was lacking and got drawn into a more project-based approach to art making. I have throughout my years at art schools worked with painting, photography, objects, sculpture, text and often combined several of these mediums together in installations backed up with a concept that supported my projects intent. But I always had a foot in the aesthetics of painting and often saw my works through a “painters eyes” , putting a lot of effort in the materials and making of my art works.

Painting has often been a guilty pleasure of mine to work with but I have strived to be critical to painting and aware of what kind of different values are placed on painting. The different values that are projected on painting such as aesthetic, emotional, economic, and historical values have been of interest and led me into different projects throughout the years. In the processing of a material or in the research phase, some of my ideas grow intuitively to create a work. I examine and experiment my ideas through different mediums that hopefully can produce different levels of meaning and depth into the work.

This openness that I am striving for had often lead me into new paths that have later involved into new projects and artworks. From seeking up places relating to historical landscape paintings with emotionally and political significance to searching into the provenance of certain painting.

For my Bachelor I made a project about a once lost art collection belonging to a Dutch art dealer. The fate of the collection reveals how it was “acquired” by the Nazi’s during WWII, and was then later found and returned to the Netherlands after the war. However, the Dutch government rejected the claim made by the heirs for the collection; it therefore remained in the Dutch national collection until 2006 when it finally returned to heirs.

Throughout autumn 2011 I searched for places and documents relating to the collection around the Netherlands following the trails of the collection. My project stood between reality and fiction, I sought to examine how history is being depicted in ways, which can blur the distinction between reality and fiction.

For the visual presentation I staged a installation that resembled a show room of an typical art dealer in Amsterdam with “Wunder kammer” aesthetics. In the installation I had several objects and works of my own and others that related to the story of the collection.

The most central part of the installation was a reproduction of the most important painting from the collection called *Ferry Boat with cattle on the River Vecht near Nijenrode* by the 17th century artist Salomon van Ruysdael.



The van Ruysdael Painting, oil on canvas (Reproduction, made in China), frame, 78x104cm. 2012 (artwork by author)

THE STORY OF THE “*CATTLE RESTING IN A LANDSCAPE WITH RIVERSIDE CASTLE AND RAINBOW BEYOND*” PROJECT

When I searched the internet for different copying companies to reproduce the van Ruysdael painting for my Bachelor graduation project I came across a company called Supra-Art in Xiamen, China that is specialized in making reproductions of the world's greatest art works. The company stated on their homepage that “all artists are experienced, talented individuals, most of which have graduated from college or university. They tend to specialize in a particular style or area, such as impressionism or portraiture.”

With the resembling of a factory the production is divided amongst several different art workers, all of them with different skills to produce the best result as possible.

So I proposed an offer to Supra-Art to make an reproduction of the van Ruysdael painting in the exact measurements and to be of “museum quality” (Which is the best quality mark in the copy business)

After a few emails back and forth and some delays (due to the Chinese spring festival at the time) my reproduction arrived at the mail a couple of weeks later.

The reproduction became a simplified representation of the original painting by an artist with history and provenance, but the similarities were yet there.

Instead of one artist's characteristic brushstrokes and coloring, my reproduction was made by several artist's touch. My reproduction was made through a division of labor amongst several painters in order to make the painting as fast and efficient as possible, yet without lacking in quality. This level of meaning was at that point not of any great importance in my graduation work, but it planted a seed that would later lead me into a new direction in my art practice.

After my graduation back in 2012 I sat in my studio thinking of what I wanted to do next, I was stuck in my process and could not think of anything to do,

I then began to look back into my previous works to see if there was something there to return to and go further with. My thoughts stopped at my bachelor work and on the reproduction of the van Ruysdael painting that I have ordered from an art copying company in China.

I was fascinated by the idea of an original painting being turned into a reproduction that questioned the authorship of the painting. The notion of the original noticing the authorship of the painting with the artist's tactile brushstrokes, movement, and signature as a quality mark.

The reproduction on the other side is made through quick and effective brushstrokes and the labor is divided among several painters to produce the painting as fast as possible.

In that sense the concept of the original painting versus copy are as far from each other.

But what is it really that set aside those opposites besides history and provenance?

In our contemporary art we have seen a deskilling of the craftsmen in art production.

More effort is put on the idea behind the process, and the execution of the work is secondary to the meaning of the work. But in history painting was seen as a highly craft that honors the artists mind, experiences and handprint into the artwork.

To me there was something almost in common with the contemporary artist and the work of a copy painter in China. In my point of view both are problematizing the valuation of art and artworks, although through different strategies and approaches. Also the notion on labor in art production is highly occupied by both.

So I began to think and research on how I could do a project that would involve contacting the company and China and order them to make a reproduction of mine.

I came up with the idea to buy an original painting on the art market with a certain history and provenance. I searched on Ebay and found a small, original Old Master painting on panel named *Cattle Resting in a Landscape with Riverside Castle and Rainbow Beyond*, by a “follower” (which is valued less than an apprentice) to the Dutch artist Aelbert Jacobsz Cuyp (1620-1691), probably painted in the 18th century. The painting depicted a landscape with three cows and rainbow over a castle.



Cattle Resting in a Landscape with Riverside Castle and Rainbow Beyond (Original painting and title), oil on panel, wood frame, size of painting 15x18cm. Approx. 18th century

Once in my belongings I took a picture of the painting and contacted the same company in Xiamen that I had been in contact with before, to order a reproduction of it.

I came in contact with woman called Vivian who is the “laoban niang” in mandarin, which means the “boss lady”. We discussed the type of quality, price and I asked how is the process being made. She explained to me that after they have received the documentation (gao) of the subject, she would then give it to painters (huajia) that will use it as “manuscript copy” in the process of copying the painting. With the resembling of a factory or “Huachang” (meaning just painting factory) the production is divided amongst several different workers, all of them with different skills to produce the best result as possible.

She also explained that first the painters will draw up a sketch (qigao) (and she assured it was “by hand”), and later they would mix up the paint and match it with “gao”. Someone that might be an apprentice (huato) will be painting easier tasks like the sky or clouds, another more skillful painter will be painting figures or animals and houses.

In order to make the process of copying more efficient the paintwork on the canvas will be put on an assembly line (quan), so that none of the painters will be stuck in the production line in order to make more fluent and pass on to the other painter on the line.

Vivian explained that to assure the best quality as possible she will let her “huashi” (i.e. painting master) make the last approval of the copy painting and decide if it is ready to be shipped to the customer.¹

After a couple of weeks I received the reproduction of the *Cattle Resting in a Landscape with Riverside Castle and Rainbow Beyond*, I took a picture of it and contacted Vivian again to repeat the procedure above. She met my offer with some distrust and asked me why I wanted a new copy from the painting that I had already received from her. I felt now that there was a gap in our interpretation of my project and the intent to order a second reproduction. But I explained to her briefly and said that the art workers must use the new “gao” of the reproduction and not the “original gao” from the beginning of the process. Once I was assured from Vivian that they would follow my conditions the project started to take another form. The art workers are now reproducing one of their own works and the second reproduction is now being dismantled further away from the first original painting. This type of work process is probably nothing new to them since they are often reproducing one of the same motif from a typical well known artists such as Vincent van Gogh or Ilya Repin. But my intentional idea with this project was that they were copying one of their own previous artworks and therefore making a more creative and personal piece of painting.

I repeated the above stated process four times and for each of every painting there were small irregularities from the previous one. The reproductions were shifting in color and details from each and other and they were positioned further away from the first original painting. The last reproduction in the line is becoming more of a work of its own and not just a reproduction of an Old Master painting.

I stopped in the beginning of 2013 and put the project on hold for a while. But during early spring 2015 in Shanghai, I took up the project once again to continue the process of repeating the gesture of copying of the painting.

¹ *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade*, Wong, Winnie Won Yin, loc 5085- 5118



Cattle Resting in a Landscape with Riverside Castle and Rainbow Beyond, 2012 (Artwork by author)

On the 19th of January I brought with me the fourth and the latest reproduction painting with to a street in Shanghai named Wen Ding Road, also called just “Painter’s Street”.

The Painter’s Street is a 200 m long street cramed with small shops (huashi) and galleries (hualang), runned by either the artists (huajia) them selves or a dealer of paintings (huashang) As I walked down the street I examined the different styles of artwork in the different shop and galleries and looked for someone who was especially trained in the style of Old Master and landscape paintings. Although most shops had a similar repertoire with easily sold motifs, my decision landed on a painter who was in his forties and runned the shop by him self with help from his sister.

I showed him the painting and gave him instructions on what size and type of canvas and that specified that it should be an exact copy made with oil paint. We decided on 100RMB (Approx 130SEK) and the painter said I could pick up the painting on the 31th of January. 10 days later I went back and had an assistant with that could translate my question I had prepared and was eager to ask the painter I had ordered the fifth reproduction from.

KPN: What is your name?

Yang Jia Shi

KPN: Where are you from?

I was born in Shanghai, but I lived in Guangdong for a couple a years for studies. But I moved back to Shanghai in early 2000.

Where did you study art school?

YJS: I studied at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in the Guangdong province in southern China. I graduated back in 2000. I was thought by my professor to paint classical motifs that would be the most marketable and desired by people. But I also tried to develop my own style there, although I don't use it that much anymore.

KPN: Why did you become an artist?

YJS: Because I love to paint!

KPN: What kind of paintings do you prefer to paint? Do you make your own paintings besides work?

YJS: I like to paint anything! But I prefer to paint large scale landscape paintings. But I can paint small paintings too, without too much difficulty. I have done some paintings on my own but I paint mostly to sell here in my shop or by orders of specific motifs.

KPN: Is creativity important in your work as a painter in your shop?

YJS: It is not my main aspect while I am painting, but I try to incorporate my own style in small distinctive ways. It can be a different arrangement or putting emphasizes on the small things, or just what I think is the most important thing in the painting. Also I like to use brighter colors to put extra highlights in my works.

Now I am making landscape paintings from a calendar I have found. Instead of focusing on the trees and clouds, I put in more details in the grass and cows because I think it is the most important part of the painting.

KPN: Do you see yourself as an artist as an art worker?

YJS: Oh this is just for work to support my family.

KPN: but you have so many paintings...

YJS: What you see stacked here is just for my work because I can make them very inexpensive and sell them for cheap. Maybe I am bit of an artist but since it is not my own ideas and subject matter I am not a "true artist". In order to be a true artist would use his own ideas and style.



Translator Sarah Jonik interviewing Yang Jia Shi in his studio, Painter's Street, Shanghai, Feb, 2015

(Photograph by author)

He showed me around in his working place and showed me his latest work, his family was also there and his son was playing on the ground. I asked him finally if it was hard to paint my reproduction and how long it took him. He replied “Oh not at all! I did in a day, it took five hours”. After a bit chatting we shook hands and finalized the transaction and I took with me the newly made reproduction, number five in the order, and left his shop. I went back onto Painter's Street to look for another suitable painter that I could hand it over to for another reproduction to be made.

Later in March 2015 I went to the city of Shenzhen near the border to Hong Kong to visit a suburb called Dafen Village. This village is solely dedicated to supply the world with cheap oil reproductions. The early copy painting industry of western style reproductions had its center mainly in Hong Kong during the 70's and 80's but started to reallocate the industry over to Mainland China and especially to Shenzhen. Shenzhen had during the economic reform in the late 70's been transformed into a special economic free zone in the otherwise state controlled economy of China. Established painters in the industry were now able to start

up trade companies in Shenzhen with good predictions. The advantage of cheaper rents, lower cost of living and a far greater access to cheap labor and art apprentices made it very profitable in the early years of the establishing of Dafen village.² Today there are approximately a hundred of companies in Dafen employing thousands of workers that live with their families and work in the same area.



Art workers in Dafen Village, Shenzhen, China in March 2015 (Photograph by author)

Dafen village became the last point off my journey with the project of the “*Cattle Resting in a Landscape with Riverside Castle and Rainbow Beyond*”. I looked for a suitable copy painter as I strolled around the village until I found one company called Shenzhen Sunrise Art Center which is one of the first and biggest companies in Dafen. I talked to the boss lady of the company named Helen Cao and I handed over the 6th version of the reproduction painting and explained I wanted a copy of that painting. We discussed the price and the time for making the painting and after that I headed back to Hong Kong. Later after three weeks the seventh reproduction painting arrived with mail back home in Stockholm.

² Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade, Wong, Winnie Won Yin, loc 119-241

EAT CHINESE FOOD, DRIVE GERMAN AND LIVE IN A FRENCH - STYLED HOUSE

Something that has become a new phenomenon in modern Chinese architecture is the notion of “replica cities” or “theme town”. These replica places are either copied straight from famous western places such as Venice, Austrian village of Hallstatt, the Eiffel tower or in the architecture style of German, Dutch, English, French or even the Swedish town Sigtuna.

In a day you can walk around at the Champ Ellysee and later taking a condole trip in the canals of the city Hangzhou one hour outside of Shanghai.

But influences from other western architecture styles are not something new in Asia since there are still a lot traces today from colonialism in Vietnam (French style), Indonesia (Dutch style) or even in the so called “Former French Concession” in Shanghai where you have a more modern influences of Art Deco style housing.

Shanghai had since the early 20th century a big influence by foreign developers who invested into buildings with western styles and Art Deco had the biggest impact on the city’s skyline. Most famously Art Deco buildings were built around the Bund on the bank of Huangpu river but also in the French Concession in the downtown area of Shanghai. But many of these buildings was constructed with Chinese features and built according to Feng Shui rules. Example of that is Five Elements Pavilion in the garden of Pei Mansion in the French Concession. Constructed in 1934 the pavilion has both Chinese features such as ornaments and also that the pavilion it self is a Chinese creation. But the pavilion has also part from the European Art Deco style with classicistic features. Due to that Shanghai was saved from the bombings of the WW2, Shanghai has until this day the largest amount of persevered Art Deco buildings in the world.



Five Elements Pavilion in the garden of Pei Mansion, French Concession, Shanghai (Photograph by author)

What differs the older western influent architecture to these new replica cities or neighborhoods complex are that they are initiated by the local Chinese developers themselves, and not forced upon by a colonialist ruler to demonstrate their cultural dominance.

But the notion of copying in architecture and culture in China is a long tradition and goes back to the old dynasties.

If the west stands for the culture of the “original” and admirer of the “authentic”, China has instead a more open, fluid and non-static approach to the original and a tolerant way of copying what is considered to be “real” and “authentic”. Copying of originals is even seen as quality mark for technological and cultural advantage and a good copy is valued the same as the original one.³ This kind of philosophy can be summed up in what you might call “Shanzhai” which can be interpreted as the “art of copying”.

³ *Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China*, Bosker, Bianca, loc 564

The Shanzhai culture of copying should not be seen as bad attempt to copy originality but instead often something sophisticated and creative. A shanzhai product comes out of a demand for a special design or functionality and is more flexible and adapts easier than more regular products do on the market due to a regulated planning from the developers.

This state of constant variation and transformation provide a culture of a constant process of creativeness. The copying of existing things is a deconstruction of the originality away from identity and the personal performance, instead focusing on a collective transformation of creativity.⁴

The western canon of the real and authentic has a clear distinction on where it begins and ends, the Chinese culture has instead a non-absolute and undefined definition of the authentic and the real. The real and the fake can correspond equally and overlap each other.

Instead of valuating the origin of the real, things can instead “come into being” and merge with reality. In western culture the authentic and the real have a fixed and heterogeneous perception in time and space, in Chinese culture are these features rather evolved into time and space in a state of flux without any closed ends.

What unites the real and the copy in Chinese culture is that both is connected through energy or “qi” and can be charged with the same meaning and purpose. What gives something life (real) and meaning (purpose) is “Dao” or the “force of life” which is the essential part. This way of seeing the reality of the original and the authentic gives a wider acceptance to copy and reproducing things that might be seen as a original to others.⁵

One thing that also comes in mind regarding copying in Chinese culture is the long tradition of constructed landscapes into what call “Chinese garden” that replicates the natural of nature. These vast places of faux nature was assembled with plants, stones, man-made lakes and animals from foreign places, faunas and recreated into a controlled environment that would tell of the initiators good taste, travel experience and power.

⁴ *Shanzhai*, Han Byung-Chul, page 77-88

⁵ *Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China*, Bosker, Bianca, loc 573-696

These gardens would serve as a playground for the wealthy, powerful elite who could spend their leisure time to reflect on life and nature. These gardens could also have a more spiritual and symbolic value and tell different stories of ancient myths and could be referred as microcosms of the universe. By copying nature the Chinese gardens acknowledge nature as the most creative force in our existence and stands above the individual intellect. The creativity of nature is always in a state of constant process of repetition, variations and mutations of things and adaptation to the existing environment.⁶

The legacy of creating faux nature and the history of copy-making may be a few of the reasons why Chinese developers have a more open and free approach to appropriating the style of “the other” and the “exotic” when they are constructing new housings. But what is might be essential to put in context is what kind of architecture Chinese developers are constructing new housing buildings.

The Chinese developers are most likely limited to copy from a distinctive type of western architecture that may be linked to the more flourishing, imperialistic eras of European bourgeoisie culture. Different styles of architecture from ancient Greek, roman, new classicists, rococo, Victorian or old Dutch are being used, while more modernism styles related to brutalism, Bauhaus, functionalism are discarded.

This appropriation of in this special case “the other” might have a different meaning from the previously more common appropriation of the other by western colonialism.⁷

⁶ *Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China*, Bosker, Bianca, loc 710-815

⁷ *Original Copies: Architectural Mimicry in Contemporary China*, Bosker, Bianca, loc 2167-2182



View over the Swedish themed suburb of Luodian Town with the man-made lake Maleren, Shanghai, March 2015 (Photograph by author)

SHANGHAI PEARL MARKET

In the beginning of 2015 I traveled to Shanghai, China for a two months scholarship with the initial idea to research on copy culture and start up a collaboration with local artists in a site-specific project that would integrate with the local surroundings. The key idea is to see the whole visit as a platform for exchanging new ideas and methods and learn from each others work and process. During the project we would use a studio space to set up our own "workshop" where we imitate various materials. In accordance with simple methods of reproducing artwork we imitate material and divide the work between all of us involved in the studio. The cultural aspect was of importance to work with local artists, and my hope was that there would be an interesting meeting point between me as a Swedish artist and Chinese artists.

Without any direct knowledge on how to set up my project I began the first couple of weeks to ask people I met about a studio space to rent and finally how to get in touch with local artists that were willing to participate in my project. After a week I got a suggestion to contact a local Shanghai artist named Chen Hengfeng about a studio space left in the studio building where he was located at. I then contacted Hengfeng and we decided to meet up and to discuss the issue.

A week after I met him at his studio in the outskirts of Shanghai in a old factory compound called Hero Pen Factory where it used to produce pens. I presented my project to him and we had a look at the empty studio space. It was a big 60m² empty space that would be perfect for the project I had in mind, I said I was very interested and we made up an agreement for a period of one week to rent. I asked Hengfeng if he might know a couple of artists who would suit for my project, he replied that he would look it up.

A week later he called me and said he had found an artist willing to take a meeting with me about participating in my project.

His name was Jiang Weitao and he was born in Shanghai in 1975 and graduated from the Department of Oil Painting, College of Fine Arts, Shanghai University in 2001.

Working with abstraction in painting Jiang, like many Chinese artists, is interested in creating a harmony between his abstract paintings and the outside world like nature, Chinese culture, history and so on.. In his paintings he demonstrate a understanding of formal elements of balance, bringing together a painterly expression of dynamism and vibrancy.



Jiang Weitao, Work 1112, oil on canvas, 112 x 82 cm, 2011

One Chinese art historian Wen Fong writes about Jiang's uniquely Chinese approach to abstraction: "Because the key to Chinese painting is calligraphic brushwork, the integrity and cohesion of Chinese art theory and the practice of calligraphy are based not on the priority of either representation or nonrepresentation but on the essential harmony between the two. ...Jiang is clear to state that his interest does not lie in "conforming to the surface of form," but rather in harmonies between "the spirit and context of an individual, stillness and movement, forward and reverse..." His attention to this harmony reflects Daoist principles, which often emerge in theoretical assessments of modern and contemporary Chinese

abstraction.” In Jiang’s paintings I could see a similar connection and approach to abstraction and representation to what I am interested in my own practice.

By borrowing from the repetitive and standardized realm of crafts, the imitation as method has a central role in my art production. In past history, the imitation was seen as a highly valued craftsmanship and fulfilled the desire and status. Before the faux surfaces required a great deal of skill and training to produce and was handed down among the craftsmen.

The division of different values between craft and painting interests me to translate the different techniques into my own paintings. In my works I try to create a visual illusions that open up a conceptual split between an appearance of tangibility, of the works mass and feel, and the actual physical objects present. I aim to play with the artworks physicality and material presence through different means and methods.

In that sense we are both working with repetitive gestures, materiality, harmony, questions of representation and within the realm of craft and history.⁸

I contacted Jiang and we had a meeting to discuss the project and the conditions around it.

We discussed the aims with the project and how we would set up the whole project.

Questions of who is the owner of the work and its intention came up.

My intention with project was that I presented I method of how to collaborate on a work and that we would share the imaterial properties to the final artwork.

We also decided on that we would make a folding screen out of the painted canvas that would symbolize our collaboration between me as a Swedish artist as Jiang as a Chinese artist.

The folding screen which is originally a early Japanese/Chinese furniture creation and worked as room divider to open up and create spaces. With Feng shui features the folding screen created flow of energy to pass through the room. Also the folding screens were highly decorated with landscapes scenes, calligraphy, and pitoresque scenes from every day life.

During the height of the western imperialistic era the western powers brought home the folding screen and made them into common feature in the European bourgeoisie class.

The folding screen demonstrated something exotic and of good taste that probably the owner had brought home from one of his travels in the Far East. But finally the folding screen

⁸ *Essay: The Harmonic Abstraction of Jiang Weitao*, Tally Beck, Beijing, July 2007

became later part of European and especially French crafts and had its prominence during the rococo period, peaking around mid 1800th century.

This transformation of influences from the Chinese artistic influences and western, baroque style created something we can sum up as “Chinoiserie”.

This cultural appropriation of the “other” became a common element during the imperialistic period in the western Art and Crafts movement, to show superiority as a culture above the other, in their minds, “primitive” or undeveloped cultures.

But now China has emerge as a super power with its leading position on the global economy and the current redistribution of cultural capital between China and west. It seems as if the situation has changed, giving the advantage to China which has previously been disadvantaged on the global scene.



Me and Jiang Weitao working together on the canvas for the SHANGHAI PEARL MARKET at Hero Pen Factory, Shanghai in March 2015 (Photograph by author)

After a week of working and to let the roled out paintings to dry we wrapped it up in plastic and I then brought it back to Stockholm. While back I started to cut up the canvases in to smaller panels and then started to build the folding screen. The work will be presented at the spring exhibnition at Konstfack in May 2015. The folding screen will be placed in the middle of a coidor so visitors can go around it and see both sides of it. The work will function as a room divider but also open up new spaces. It will also be between something architectonic, a crafts piece but also a painting.



CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have written about my current practice and the ideas behind it. In my works I have borrowed from the repetitive and standardized realm of crafts and the imitation as method has a central role in my art production.

The division of different values and hierarchies between craft and painting interests me to proceed and question around those topics. In my works I try to create a visual illusions that open up a conceptual split between an appearance of tangibility, originality against imitation, and the actual physical objects present. I aim to play with the artworks material presence and the different values placed upon different mediums.

In past history, the imitation was seen as a highly valued craftsmanship and fulfilled the desire and status of decorating your walls or stairways as if you lived in a Venetian palazzo or some kind. Before the faux surfaces required a great deal of skill and training to produce and was handed down among the craftsmen.

But now other materials and techniques have ousted the use of the imitation and it has later been considered to be of “bad taste” and of “low value”. The division of different values between craft and painting interests me to translate the different techniques into my own paintings.

In one part of my practice I am fascinated by the concept of an original painting being turned into a reproduction that questioned the authorship of the painting. The notion of the original noticing the authorship of the painting with the artist’s tactile brushstrokes, movement, and signature as a quality mark. The reproduction on the other side is made through quick and effective brushstrokes without acknowledge the different features of an original work of art. In that sense the concept of the original painting versus copy are as far from each other. In our contemporary art we have seen a deskilling of the craftsmen in art production.

More effort is put on the idea behind the process, and the execution of the work is secondary to the meaning of the work. But in history painting was seen as a highly craft that honors the artists mind, experiences and handprint into the artwork.

By comparing the practice of contemporary art making with copying of paintings in one of my projects and in this thesis my conclusion is that both practices are problematizing the valuation of artworks and how establish different hierarchies in art. Although they have different approaches and meanings they both touch on the notion of art production, labor and how we value art of painted matter.

In the western canon of the originality in art has a clear definition on where it begins and ends, in traditional Chinese art has instead a non-absolute and undefined distinction of the authentic and the real. The original and the copy can correspond equally and overlap each other. Instead of valuating the originality, things can instead “come into being” and merge with reality. The original and the copy rather evolve into time and space in a state of flux without any closed ends.

This state of constant variation and transformation provide a culture of a constant process of creativeness. The copying of existing things is a deconstruction of the originality away from identity and the personal performance, instead focusing on a collective transformation of creativity. For my graduation work I will make a folding screen out of the painted canvas that I have produced in Shanghai together with a Chinese artist.

The folding screen which is originally a early Japanese/Chinese furniture creation and worked as room divider to open up and create spaces. With Feng shui features the folding screen created flow of energy to pass through the room. Also the folding screens were highly decorated with landscapes scenes, calligraphy, and pitoresque scenes from every day life.

This transformation of influences from the Chinese artistic influences and western, baroque style created something we can sum up as “Chinoiserie”. This cultural appropriation of the “other” became a common element during the imperialistic period in the western Art and Crafts movement, to show superiority as a culture above the other, in their minds, “primitive” or undeveloped cultures.

But now China has emerge as a super power with its leading position on the global economy and the current redistribution of cultural capital between China and west. It seems as if the situation has changed, giving the advantage to China which has previously been disadvantaged on the global scene.



Mimicry of “ancient ruins” in newly built apartment complex in downtown Shanghai (Photograph by author)

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