

*This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

**Master of Arts, East Asian Studies  
Stanford University**

**Made in China:**  
Implications of Authorship and Historical Studio Practices on  
Modern Chinese Art

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August 21, 2016

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When his exhibition at the Royal Academy of the Arts opened in January 2012, David Hockney made certain that the promotional materials for the show included the phrase, "All the works here were made by the artist himself, personally."<sup>1</sup> Hockney's words marked a not-so-subtle jab at the growing number of artists, including international superstars like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, who unabashedly allocate the majority, if not entirety, of the facture of their projects to their assistants. Though many artists might require the aid of assistants to realize monumental installations for practical reasons of size or quantity, there is a distinction to be drawn between practical use of outside aid and wholesale delegation. Debates over the amount of skill and personal involvement required on the part of the "creator" artist have become commonplace within art historical discourse and critical writing and can be traced throughout thousands of years of art history in the East and the West. Such debates have antecedents in discussions of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Conceptual art, and even deeper historical roots investigations of workshop or studio practices by artist-entrepreneurs such as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). While Hirst openly acknowledges that he lacks the technical skill, time, and desire to paint his own works,<sup>2</sup> he also notes the irony of the value ascribed to them. In his book, *On the Way to Work*, Hirst recalls when one of his assistants asked the artist for one of his famed spot paintings. He told her to "make

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Abad-Santos, "David Hockney Reminds Damien Hirst That He Doesn't Use Assistants," *The Wire*, published Jan 3, 2012, <<http://www.thewire.com/entertainment/2012/01/david-hockey-reminds-damien-hirst-he-doesnt-use-assistants/46924/>> accessed Mar. 12, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Megan Willett, "People Are Furious With Damien Hirst For Not Making His Own Art," *Business Insider*, published June 12, 2013, <<http://www.businessinsider.com/why-damien-hirst-is-controversial-2013-6#ixzz3TrxB0RxA>> accessed March 13, 2015.

one of your own." When she insisted that she wanted one made by him, he replied, "The only difference, between one painted by her and one of mine, is the money."<sup>3</sup> Hockney begs to differ, citing a Chinese proverb: "You need the eye, the hand and the heart. Two won't do."<sup>4</sup>

The question remains as to whether a serious artist can ever mass-produce or fully delegate the production of a work without sacrificing its artistic integrity or "selling out" to service an ever more commodified art market. Many art critics, however, act as though the question is resolved. Uli Sigg a major collector of Chinese art notes, "Jeff Koons doesn't touch anything. Bridget Riley has workers. It's accepted today. It doesn't have to have traces of your own hand."<sup>5</sup> But as much confidence as some have in the validity of studio production, for others the debate rages on. Artists<sup>6</sup>, certain critics<sup>7</sup>, and the general public<sup>8</sup> regularly mock those contemporary artists who produce nontraditional art objects with the aid of assistants and other fabrication and mass production techniques. A small protest movement called Stuckism has formed in England in response to Damien Hirst and

<sup>3</sup> Willett.

<sup>4</sup> Abad-Santos.

<sup>5</sup> David Barboza, "Chinese Artist Zhou Tiehai Proves the Emperor Is Naked," The New York Times, April 30, 2006, accessed July 23, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/arts/design/01zhou.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Sherwin, "Artists Debate over the Use of Artist Assistants -- Where Do You Stand?," Fine Art Views, August 1, 2012, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://faso.com/fineartviews/38751/artists-debate-over-the-use-of-artist-assistants-where-do-you-stand>.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Jones, "Damien Hirst Is a National Disgrace," The Guardian, August 30, 2012, accessed July 26, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/aug/30/damien-hirst-national-disgrace>.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Davis, "In Defense of Concepts," Artnet, November 24, 2009, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/in-defense-of-concepts11-24-09.asp>.

his compatriots, claiming that “Artists who don’t paint aren’t artists,” and “Art that has to be in a gallery to be art isn’t art.”<sup>9</sup> When asked to comment on her definition of authorship, Stuckist artist Jasmine Surreal said, “If a painting is by one artist and one alone, then only that can be deemed true authorship.”<sup>10</sup> One critic recalls speaking at a panel on contemporary art, and the very first question posed was: “Don’t you think that the artist has an *ethical responsibility* to make their own work? How would you feel as a writer if someone took your words and published them as their own?” The heated discussion surrounding this issue shows no signs of cooling down, indicating that this issue will remain salient no matter how commonplace the use of assistants becomes.

It is within this climate that three prominent contemporary Chinese artists, Ai Weiwei, Zhou Tiehai, and Cai Guoqiang, currently operate, all relying upon varying modes of studio production. China, a nation whose economy is stereotypically best known for cheap, mass-produced knock offs may ironically provide a cultural and historical environment where the impact of the works can actually be strengthened by the use of assistants and assembly-line manufacturing techniques. Ever since the reform and opening up period in the eighties, the once-repressed Chinese art scene has exploded, producing artists with creativity, vitality, and a healthy amount of anti-establishment iconoclasm. Many Chinese artists, like their international counterparts, make use of assistants and workshops in order to produce their work, but they do so within a radically different context. When

<sup>9</sup> Charles Thomson and Billy Childish, "The Stuckists Manifesto," The Stuckists Manifesto, August 4, 1999, , accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.stuckism.com/stuckistmanifesto.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Personal Correspondence from Jasmine Surreal, July 28, 2016.

Chinese artists create installations with extensive use of assistants or mass production techniques, the viewer must consider the numerous historical and contemporary factors that might have played into that decision. While these factors may not completely remove these three Chinese artists from the current debate over the validity of assistant/workshop utilization, the nods to both mass production and copying provide an added layer of complexity and critique to the pieces in question. By tying their art practice to China-specific cultural traditions, current economic trends, and national political ethos, Cai, Ai, and Zhou manage to launch a convincing argument in favor of not just the 'acceptableness' of assisted production but its necessity to the core meaning and function of their art. The source of the context within which these artists operate lies within the long history of copying, mass production, and workshop practices within both Eastern and Western art history.

Historical instances of studio production abound, though not all are commonly known. It is, however, widely acknowledged that Roman artists produced countless copies of Greek statues and sculptures, using plaster casts of the originals that were then shipped to varying workshops around the empire.<sup>11</sup> From what we do know of the Greeks, it seems unlikely that questions of authorship within the visual arts would have plagued the citizens, as the artist was generally looked down upon as weak, low class, and unworthy of admiration as an individual. Plutarch's "Life of Pericles" (c. 50-120 AD) sheds some light on this belief:

<sup>11</sup> "Roman Copies of Greek Statues," The Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2002, accessed June 10, 2016, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rogr/hd\\_rogr.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rogr/hd_rogr.htm).

"It doesn't follow that if a work of art delights with its grace, the man who made it is worthy of serious regard. No one who sees Zeus at Olympia [the gold and ivory cult statue by Pheidias, "artistic director" of the Parthenon] or Hera at Argos [another gold and ivory statue by Polykleitos] wishes to be Pheidias or Polykleitos."<sup>12</sup>

Without these Roman copies, far less would be known of Greek art and culture today.

It was common for Chinese artists to make use of assistants, much like their European counterparts. Many well-known Chinese artists ran studios which were primarily organized within the artist's household and included family members, servants, assistants, and apprentices.<sup>13</sup> Assistants would often complete the more tedious, undesirable tasks. There is evidence of assistants coloring the paintings of their masters as far back as the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD).<sup>14</sup> Sometimes the disciples would act as ghost painters who would complete the entire work for their often busy, sometimes lazy masters; the only touch of the artist was his signature on the final product.<sup>15</sup> Both Dong Qichang and Jin Nong's made prolific and unapologetic use of ghost painters; the two artists also displayed a willingness to sign forgeries of their work, regardless of who created it. <sup>16</sup> Chinese art connoisseurs of the time likely knew that there was a high chance of receiving a ghost painted or forged work, as indicated by various examples of a patron requesting that the artist

<sup>12</sup> "The Life of Pericles" by Plutarch, featured in *The Parallel Lives* [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Pericles\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Pericles*.html).

<sup>13</sup> James Cahill, *The Painter's Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 102.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 140-3.

himself paint the painting (and not an assistant). In one letter, artist Jin Nong apologizes to a friend for not getting him his painting in a timely manner, saying that his disciple Luo Ping had been too busy to ghost paint it.<sup>17</sup>

This open use of assistants finds parallels in European studio practices throughout the Renaissance and onward, until the rise of Impressionism, which shifted the focus back to the hand of the artist as the primary arbiter of authorship. During the Italian Renaissance, many artists operated in workshop environments, including Raphael and Michelangelo to a large degree. Leonardo, though he was known for working independently, occasionally had to enlist the help of an assistant in order to complete a large-scale project, as in the case of “Battle of the Anghiari” painted in the Great Council Hall of Palazzo Vecchio.<sup>18</sup> Michelangelo had his assistant Urbino help translate his preparatory drawings into paintings, as in the case of the Pauline Chapel frescos.<sup>19</sup> Many Italian artists relied on assistants to prepare the painting surfaces, transfer the base drawings, and even execute the underpainting and outlining in certain cases.<sup>20</sup> There appears to have been a fairly firm distinction of design versus execution, with the master generally always preparing the original drawings and executing the most technical parts of the paintings.

The European tradition in terms of copies and duplicates mirrors modern debates over authorship to a large degree. Many copying practices were generally

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>18</sup> Carmen Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice, 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 341.

acceptable when viewed as integral to the production of the work, as in the case of transferring preliminary drawings, or else for the sake of education and practice. Leonardo, Raphael, Botticelli, Domenichino, Michelangelo, and many others made use of the pounce technique that had been anticipated by tenth century Chinese artists to transfer drawings and facilitate copies. Raphael and Andrea del Sarto used this technique in creating preliminary drawings, while evidence suggests that Michelangelo primarily used pounces to transfer his drawings onto frescos before beginning to paint.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes the artists used the pounce as a means to transfer a preparatory drawing to the canvas or wall. Other times, pounces would be used to replicate paintings and drawings at a later date, leading to lingering questions of authorship.<sup>22</sup>

Apprenticeships were commonplace among budding artists, and copying, as in China, was one of the primary means of instruction. Young artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo would assist their masters and learn by emulation, often using tracing and pounces to begin to internalize certain drawing methods and modes of representation.<sup>23</sup> Even though he openly championed the ‘originality’ of the artist, Leonardo still advocated copying as a valid means of instruction, writing, “the artist should first exercise his hand by copying drawings from the hand of a good master.”<sup>24</sup> Despite the ingrained practices of copying, as the High Renaissance artists came of age, there was a shift away from reproduction and imitation.

Leonardo believed that painting had declined over the previous hundred years

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



because of endless copying. Leonardo's concerns were echoed by many other collectors and critics from the sixteenth century onward, who felt that excessive reliance on copying techniques was detrimental to art, warning that it was "harmful to those who wish to progress."<sup>25</sup> According to collector, critic, and art historian Vasari, even Michelangelo weighed in: "it [is] necessary to have the compasses in the eye and not in the hand, because the hands work and the eye judges."<sup>26</sup> Leonardo moved the argument away from copying practices and towards the emulation of other artists, cautioning that "no one should ever imitate the style of another, because he will be called a nephew and not a child of Nature with regard to art."<sup>27</sup> In spite of the lack of consensus on the merits of duplication, similar studio practices continued in Europe for the next several hundred years.

Notable examples of later European workshop practices include Rembrandt van Rijn and Peter Paul Rubens. Rembrandt ran a bustling seventeenth century studio, where he trained many pupils who would eventually graduate to become assistants or collaborators that helped with the studio's output. Evidence indicates that Rembrandt's workshop was fairly indicative of other seventeenth century painting enterprises.<sup>28</sup> Rembrandt's students learned his style so well that, according to a local painter of the same period, people often confused the students' works with those of the master, and the pieces were sold under Rembrandt's name

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch, and Pieter Van Thiel, *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop* (New Haven: Yale University Press., 1991), 70.

at times.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, artist's guild regulations at the time dictated that disciples were not permitted to sign their own name, so all works coming out of a particular studio must necessarily bear the signature of the master, whether they were created by him or not.<sup>30</sup> Rembrandt stated in a well-known piece of correspondence that he priced the paintings according to how much of a hand he had in their creation, indicating that the master himself did put weight on his hand as the unique creator of value at least, though he clearly put less weight on his involvement as a requirement of claiming authorship.

Rubens can be considered the designer and originator of his paintings, but he often delegated much of the work to his assistants. His students and assistants relied on his preparatory drawings and oil sketches in order to realize his paintings, sometimes referring to previous studies from the master. Rubens would typically touch the painting up at the end to rectify any uninspired brushwork or shoddy technique.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1630s, Rubens took delegation within his artistic practice even further. Rubens suffered from gout and thus struggled to work on the small scale needed for his preparatory drawings. Rubens ventured into the realm of conceptual art by dictating his ideas to Erasmus Quellinus who transferred them in the form of a drawing. For this particular frontispiece, the attribution read:

"Erasmus Quellinius delineavit, Pet. Paul. Rubenius invenit, Corn. Galleus junior sculpsit." The use of 'sculpsit' indicates that there was also an engraving, meaning

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Zirka Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp, 1550-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 82

that another portion of this piece was delegated, as a skilled engraver would be the one to execute the engraving (and was listed as a collaborator in this case). This could be classified as an authorized reproduction, but most interesting is Rubens's choice to credit the craftsman in this case. The collaborative creation of this frontispiece and the crediting of the various participants raise further questions of where art originates and how to define authorship that would be tackled head on by artists in the twentieth century.

As discussed earlier, the Chinese legacy of workshop and ghost painting certainly has parallels in European studio practices. In addition, however, China has a long and complicated relationship surrounding the power and merit of copying and emulation that is somewhat distinct from the European experience. Both working in the style of a predecessor and executing copies of a master's work had a strong presence throughout Chinese history as a means to learn, demonstrate skills, earn religious merit, and even gain a following. Copying in China began at an early age, as children learned their characters and eventually memorized the classic texts. Those who demonstrated skill at memorization and a willingness to write and rewrite texts endlessly were lauded as true scholars and men of class. The Kangxi Emperor supposedly possessed great powers of stamina and perseverance, practicing one thousand characters every day without fail.<sup>32</sup> Kangxi's words of wisdom in his old age further underline the emperor's belief in repetitive study: "Only if one studies ceaselessly will one acquire skill in an artistic endeavor."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Wen Fong and James C. Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei*, (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Kangxi continues, “In my youth, when I studied, I had to read texts 120 times. If I did not, I would not understand the underlying principles.”<sup>34</sup>

Copying had an added layer of importance within the scope of Buddhist practice in ancient China, as certain repetitive activities could earn merit. For example, from 1702-1722 Kangxi wrote out the *Heart Sutra*, filling over 420 fascicles.<sup>35</sup> Buddhist artists often used stencils in part because they facilitated the quick replication of images. As with copying sutras, producing many images generated merit for both the living and the dead. In the words of art historian Lothar Ledderose, “quantity counted for more than quality”<sup>36</sup>

This faith in the transformative and moral power of rote memorization and copying carries over to many facets of Chinese education and especially artistic training. Landscape artists, even those who were depicting real places, typically created their works by combining conventional forms into standard compositions.<sup>37</sup> Artists also sometimes made copy-books, as in the case of Huang Quan, who made one for his son,<sup>38</sup> and there were also more comprehensive manuals for tree painting, bird and insect painting, etc.,<sup>39</sup> as well as studio scrolls, such as “A Hundred Horses,” which was created as a model for horse specialists.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 175.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Cahill, 101.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 99.

Copies also proved a useful reference to established artists who were already well versed in the technical aspects of painting. According to Chinese historian Zhang Geng in his 1739 *Painters of the Dynasty*:

Wang Shimin once made a selection of ancient works, among the finest both in method and in spirit—twenty-four in all—had reduced copies made of them, and had them mounted in a large album. He took this album with him wherever he went [so that the paintings could] serve as his models. Thus, in his works, every composition, every design, texture, and ink wash had its origin in an ancient source” The famed artist and collector Dong Qichang helped Wang gather the material for the albums and aided in adding inscriptions and a title page that read: “To See Large Within Small.”<sup>41</sup>

The importance of the copy within the Chinese tradition is deeply tied to history and memory. In the fifth century AD, Chinese painter and critic Xie He wrote about the “Six Elements of Chinese Painting.” Among these principles are vitality, brushwork, depiction of forms, color use, layout, and lastly, “transmission by copying.”<sup>42</sup> Since this time, Chinese art instruction often centered around mimicking a master’s style in order to understand its spirit and core components, thus allowing the production of new work in old style, in turn prompting creativity and inspiration through the study of the past. Professional “tracing masters” from the Tang dynasty (618-907) utilized early versions of light tables to make replicas of paintings and calligraphy by ancient masters.<sup>43</sup> Numerous ingenious methods of tracing and transfer were developed to facilitate copying practices, which flourished throughout China’s long history; working in the style of the old masters reached an especially high level of

<sup>41</sup> Fong, 476.

<sup>42</sup> Victor H. Mair, *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 139.

<sup>43</sup> “The Tradition of Re-Presenting Art: Originality and Reproduction in Chinese Painting and Calligraphy,” The National Palace Museum, [http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh96/re-presenting/intro\\_en.html](http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh96/re-presenting/intro_en.html), Accessed March 13, 2015

popularity with Dong Qichang's (1555-1636) rise, and replication as a means of preservation rose to an even higher prominence under Qing rule in the eighteenth century.

Various Chinese scholars and artists have even asserted that copying could be considered a higher form of art than the production of an original work. The late Ming period artist Dong Qichang, who was well known for working in the style of famous Yuan painters, commented on the technical and mental prowess required to effectively work in the style of another, saying "You have to use your predecessor's eyes and your own hand."<sup>44</sup> Although Chinese connoisseurs were still very much concerned with questions of authorship and authenticity, like their Western counterparts,<sup>45</sup> there is an added layer of respect, possibly influenced in part by the Buddhist practice, afforded to the copy as a way to, in the words of Patricia Berger, "see through the eyes of another, looks out from the same private...vantage point, and experience a moment of egolessness translating him beyond distinctions of self and nonself."<sup>46</sup>

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the culture of the copy further flourished under the official auspices of the emperor, most notably Emperor Qianlong, who avidly collected and catalogued art, often commissioning copies of famous works, which he subsequently added to his collection or gave away as gifts.<sup>47</sup> The commissioning of copies was an important act of preservation, and each

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Ann Berger, "Pious Copies" in *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 137.

<sup>45</sup> Cahill, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Berger, 134.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 124.

work of art's provenance would be carefully tracked in colophon inscriptions, which would also include various commentaries by the original artist and later owners/viewers of the painting. Art historian Patricia Berger helps summarize the importance of the copy within Chinese art history: "if the copy depends ultimately on its model for its conception, the model depends just as much on the copy for its future."<sup>48</sup> Without such a prolific culture of the copy, many Chinese masterworks would not exist today, albeit in duplicate form, nor would there be such rich art historical knowledge catalogued in the colophons. Berger describes the Chinese mentality of copying as "a constructive act" and one rife with the idea of spiritual communion (*shenhui*), which connotes an "explicitly positive, nostalgic, and personal reverie on the past."<sup>49</sup> Additionally, a far looser interpretation of intellectual property than encountered in the West today further validated the popular stance on duplication of past works. In China, once ideas are expressed, they often become a part of the public domain where they are essentially 'up for grabs' by artists and others wishing to "inhabit the mind" of an old master and learn from his hand.<sup>50</sup>

There is a power to the Chinese copy, to working in the style of another, that provided a means to channel the past, to find inspiration in the brush of a predecessor, and hopefully create a work that would cement the later artist's fame while simultaneously ensuring that the original artist's name would live on as well. The Chinese legacy of copying stands as a rather unique mode of study and

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

historical preservation, as well as a vaunted and spiritual process of inspiration through which artists could challenge themselves to express individuality and creativity in spite of, or perhaps with the aid of, the style of another.

This long tradition of Eastern and Western studio workshops and copying practices, coupled with some unique Chinese perspectives, moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where the debate over authorship and the hand of the artist finally came to a head. Artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would work to remake the role of the artist, the meaning of authorship, and even the very definition of art and what constituted an 'art object.' Often considered a founding father of sorts for conceptual art, Marcel Duchamp was among the first artists to really question what constituted a work of art and why. As early as 1913, Duchamp wondered, "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?"<sup>51</sup> With this thought already in his mind, Duchamp began to question which aspect of the work of art held primacy: "I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting...I was interested in ideas – not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once more at the service of the mind."<sup>52</sup>

These philosophical ruminations culminated in 1916-1917 in what was recently voted the most important work of art in the twentieth century<sup>53</sup>, "Fountain" (Appendix A). "Fountain," which Duchamp submitted anonymously to an exhibition organized by the Society of Independent Artists in New York, consisted of a urinal

<sup>51</sup> Gloria Moure and Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: Works, Writings and Interviews* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2009), 63.

<sup>52</sup> David W. Galenson, *Conceptual Revolutions in Twentieth-Century Art*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ProQuest ebrary, 163.

<sup>53</sup> Rob Sharp, "The Loo That Shook the World: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabi," *The Independent*, February 19, 2008, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/the-loo-that-shook-the-world-duchamp-man-ray-picabi-784384.html>.



Duchamp purchased from a plumber's showroom. Duchamp turned the urinal upside down, titled it "Fountain," and signed it with the pseudonym 'R. Mutt.' The society, of which Duchamp was one of the directors, summarily rejected his entry, stating that it was 'by no definition a work of art,' despite the fact that there was purportedly no requirement for submissions other than a six dollar entry fee.<sup>54</sup> Duchamp, who was reportedly excited about the controversy, quickly became the talk of the town.

Duchamp's piece questioned the very nature of art as it was conceived at this time and for the last several thousand years. Could an artist really sign a piece that he had no part in making and claim authorship over the piece, now considered a work of art? An article published around the time of the controversy, believed to have been penned by Duchamp, posited:

Mr Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' shop windows. Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object.<sup>55</sup>

Whether these are Duchamp's works or just those of a sympathetic colleague, the idea of taking an ordinary object, called a 'readymade' by Duchamp, and re-contextualizing it would capture and hold the attention of artists for the next hundred years to come. In Duchamp's words, "The readymades...were not chosen because they looked nice or were artistic or in conformity to my taste...that is not

<sup>54</sup> Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens, *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art?* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009),12.

<sup>55</sup> Kirstie Beaven, "Marcel Duchamp: Fountain," Tate Modern Blog, July 26, 2010, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/marcel-duchamp-fountain-work-week-26-july-2010>.

what the readymade was about.”<sup>56</sup> The introduction of the readymade opened the door for artists to create works freed from the confines of medium, the restrictions of skill, and the limitations of the scope of what one individual can accomplish. Duchamp’s work set the stage for the Conceptual art movement, which would build upon the iconoclastic foundation of “Fountain” some fifty years later.

Conceptual art has been called “modernism’s nervous breakdown,”<sup>57</sup> and indeed the movement constituted a reaction against the rigidity of modernist painting championed by critics of the time, much as Duchamp had rebelled against what he felt to be a stifling and hypocritical establishment. Conceptual art took Duchamp’s early ideas and codified them into a more concrete set of doctrines and practices, principal among them that “in conceptual art, there is no physical medium: the medium is the idea.”<sup>58</sup> Sol LeWitt, one of the leading members of the Conceptual art movement of the late 1960s, outlined his view of conceptualism in a 1967 manifesto of sorts:

“In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”<sup>59</sup>

Joseph Kosuth, a fellow Conceptual artist, further elaborated on the diminished role of the art object: “Conceptual art, simply put, has as its basic tenet an understanding that artists work with meaning, not with shapes, colours, or materials...the ‘art idea’

<sup>56</sup> Calvin Tomkins and Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2013), 54-55.

<sup>57</sup> Goldie and Schellekens, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Sol LeWitt, ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’, *Artforum* Vol.5, no. 10, Summer 1967, 79-83.

and art are the same.”<sup>60</sup> Philosophers Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens clarify this foundational belief by explaining the distinction between ‘medium’ and ‘means.’ In traditional art, the medium would be the form that the art takes (oils, acrylics, sculpture, etc.), but in conceptual art, the medium becomes merely the means of executing the artwork. The medium is actually the idea, and the art object, whether in the form of painting, installation, readymade, or anything else, merely facilitates the ‘art idea.’

Conceptual art could take many forms, including drawings or paintings but more often installations, performances, and readymades. Sol LeWitt became known for his schematic instructions for wall murals; he never painted the murals himself but rather provided a set of detailed instructions on how to execute the work, along with a note that indicated that whomsoever has these instructions owns the rights to the work and can produce it and move it as needed, so long as he retains the certificate/instructions (Appendix A). Joseph Kosuth experimented with the role of language and meaning in art, using a variety of different means. One of his most well-known works, “One and Three Chairs” (Appendix B), includes a chair, a photo of a chair, and a printout of a dictionary definition of a chair, pushing his viewers to question which of the three, if any, is the most ‘real.’ Most conceptual art also grapples with the very notion of art in much the same way Duchamp’s “Fountain” does. Even when the artist did not make the piece (as is usually the case) is not in the forefront of the concept of the work, it remains a subtle undercurrent. That the artist often has little to no hand in the physical making of Conceptual artwork

<sup>60</sup> Goldie and Schellekens, 56.

remains one of the most controversial aspects of this movement. This question over authorship and the role of the artist, as it has throughout history, still remains a point of contention today. Even though Sol LeWitt claimed that Conceptual art should be “free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman” and that “the idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product,”<sup>61</sup> many people both inside and outside of the art world beg to differ.

One of the most interesting facets of the Conceptual art movement is that although most people can agree when it began, there seems to be little consensus on when the movement ends. Roberta Smith wrote in a 1999 *New York Times* article: “It’s hard to think of a supposedly past art movement that feels more present...it is the shifting *terra infirma* on which nearly all contemporary art is built.”<sup>62</sup> Historian Paul Wood:

[i]t is not at all clear where the boundaries of ‘conceptual art’ are to be drawn, which artists and which works to include. Looked at in one way, conceptual art gets to be like Lewis Carroll’s Cheshire cat, dissolving away until nothing is left but a grin: a handful of works made over a few short years by a small number of artists... Then again, regarded under a different aspect, conceptual art can seem like nothing less than the hinge around which the past turned into the present.<sup>63</sup>

No matter where you draw the line on the boundaries of the original movement, Conceptual art and its predecessors like Duchamp certainly do have a hand in much

<sup>61</sup> LeWitt, 79-83.

<sup>62</sup> Roberta Smith, "Conceptual Art: Over, And Yet Everywhere," *The New York Times*, April 24, 1999, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/25/arts/art-architecture-conceptual-art-over-and-yet-everywhere.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>63</sup> Elisabeth Schellekens, "Conceptual Art," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/conceptual-art/>.

of the art being produced today. Many current artists, such as Damien Hirst, Tracy Emin and even Ai Weiwei have been labeled as producing conceptual art. Ben Davis posits that it has become 'cool' to hate conceptual art, saying, "The term, seemingly, has spread to cover anything that involves an idea at all, and it is often used as an epithet, as if the person speaking really wanted to say "trick art." <sup>64</sup> And perhaps what art lovers and artists alike are rebelling against is the flagrant removal of the artist from the production of his works, as in the case of Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, and so many others. Always the rebel, early in his career Hirst proclaimed: "I can't wait to get into a position to make really bad art and get away with it." Hirst certainly doesn't help the case against studio production by bragging endlessly about his use of assistants while still raking in millions for works he had little involvement with<sup>65</sup> (his current net worth is estimated at \$350 million).<sup>66</sup> The contemporary artists working in the shadow of the Conceptual movement often use and cite practices and principals of the Conceptual artists, which leads to the conflation of much contemporary art with Conceptual art. As price tags for art soar higher and higher and a large proportion of the most expensive contemporary

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/in-defense-of-concepts11-24-09.asp>.

<sup>65</sup> David Cohen, "Inside Damien Hirst's Factory," August 30, 2007, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/exhibitions/inside-damien-hirsts-factory-6609579.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop, "Top 5 World's Wealthiest Artists -- Damien Hirst Comes in First," The Huffington Post, December 16, 2013, , accessed July 28, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/artinfo/top-5-worlds-wealthiest-a\\_b\\_4108626.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/artinfo/top-5-worlds-wealthiest-a_b_4108626.html).

works were the result of studio production<sup>67</sup>, some are left feeling that perhaps these works are 'trick art' after all.

While all contemporary artists are currently operating in the same post-conceptual art world, there is final additional context that must be examined before considering the works of Cai Guoqiang, Ai Weiwei, and Zhou Tiehai. Contemporary and historical factors relevant to the use of factory-style art production techniques continue to influence Chinese artists today, and the history of such practices stretches far back into antiquity. Some of the first items produced in multiples in China were ritual bronzes cast during the Shang dynasty (1650-1050 BC). The bronzes were decorated using a modular system of production that allowed for the duplication of similar elements in various positions and orientations, giving the appearance of more complex designs.<sup>68</sup> The Chinese further demonstrated a knack for modular production by developing a means of printing on paper with blocks around the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>69</sup>, allowing for the dissemination of information, written works, illustrations, advertisement, and much more. Additionally, the Chinese excelled in the mass production and export of ceramics, producing hundreds of

<sup>67</sup>Stan Sesser, "The Art Assembly Line," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2011, , accessed June 10, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303745304576357681741418282>.

<sup>68</sup> Ledderose, 161.

<sup>69</sup> "Technological Advances During the Song Dynasty," *The Song Dynasty in China | Asia Topics in World History*, , accessed July 28, 2016, <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song/tech/printing.htm>.

millions of pieces of porcelain,<sup>70</sup> with over two million pieces produced during the Ming Dynasty alone.<sup>71</sup>

The Chinese also have a long history of workshop style production, including the production of paintings utilizing interchangeable stencils and pounce techniques<sup>72</sup> similar to those that would later be employed by Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo, and other Renaissance artists. Even well-respected Chinese artists often produced in multiples, such as Cheng Zhengkui (early Qing), who intended to paint five hundred copies of his series “Imaginary Journeys Among Rivers and Mountains” and is said to have completed over 300.<sup>73</sup> The need to meet market demand and have gifts on hand for political and networking purposes led many Chinese painters, Dong Qichang,<sup>74</sup> Zhu Da, and Ni Zan<sup>75</sup> among them, to create multiple, lower quality paintings (relative to their masterworks) for such day-to-day uses. Zhang Daqian completed 30,000 paintings in his lifetime.<sup>76</sup> These tendencies towards mass production continue into the modern day.

Contemporary mass production in China adds yet another layer to the historical culture surrounding high volume manufacture. This can be seen in the “made in China” epithet that accompanied rapid industrial growth in the post-Mao era, as well as the booming Chinese counterfeit/replica economy. References to all of these phenomena can be found in many contemporary Chinese artworks, where

<sup>70</sup> Ledderose, 167.

<sup>71</sup> Fong, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Ledderose, 167.

<sup>73</sup> Cahill, 49.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Ledderose, 206.

the use of multiples and/or assembly line procedures represents a deliberate conceptual or strategic choice rather than one born of mere convenience or pragmatism. In contemporary China, the tradition of copying remains a strong socio-economic force, one which can be seen in the booming knock-off industry and relatively weak intellectual property laws and enforcement. From 2008-2010, 70% of counterfeit goods seized globally were produced in China, and in the United States, 87% of the fakes confiscated originated in China,<sup>77</sup> marking China as the number one source of counterfeit goods in the US.<sup>78</sup> These goods are not produced solely to export; on average, 20% of all consumer products in the Chinese market are counterfeit. The abundance of fake goods in the Chinese market means that the average Chinese person is likely to come into contact with this industry regularly, either through his or her occupation or that of friends or family, or else through personal consumption and everyday experiences in urban areas. It is easy to understand why such a profitable and convenient practice would come to be accepted in Chinese society, and the relatively weak intellectual property (IP) rights in China only facilitate and rationalize the presence of counterfeiting. All of this omnipresent copying directly impacts the collective opinion regarding counterfeit culture. The more people that benefit from the knock-off industry, the greater the chance is that Chinese citizens might accept copying as a valid means for commerce in addition to the traditional purposes of education and inspiration.

<sup>77</sup> Mark Turnage, "A Mind-Blowing Number of Counterfeit Goods Come From China," *Business Insider*, June 25, 2013, accessed March 13, 2015.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/most-counterfeit-goods-are-from-china-2013-6>.

<sup>78</sup> "Intellectual Property Rights in China," Embassy of the United States: Beijing, China, accessed March 13, 2015, [http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/protecting\\_ipr.html](http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/protecting_ipr.html).



In addition to a thriving counterfeit economy, duplication also greatly impacts the Chinese psyche from the perspective of the ever-growing mass production of enormous quantities of identical goods. During the reform and opening up period in the eighties, the Chinese economy took flight and has yet to come back to earth. China is now the world's leading exporter, and 70% of those exports are in the form of manufactured goods.<sup>79</sup> Even more than the relatively narrow counterfeit sector, the growth of factory-based industry in China has affected the lives of every citizen. According to the US Department of Labor, as of 2009, 99 million Chinese were employed in manufacturing.<sup>80</sup> This means that roughly 3 in every 10 Chinese workers are in manufacturing and heavy industry<sup>81</sup>, as compared to the 1 in 10 US workers in manufacturing as of 2010.<sup>82</sup> Globally, the phrase, "Made in China" is iconic, sometimes evoking ideas of shabbily made knockoffs, other times reminding consumers that many parts of high demand, high technology products like the iPhone are in fact, made in China. Phenomena like "Made in China" assure that China remains in the news and on the world stage. Recent generations of Chinese citizens have come of age amidst the constant domestic and international debate over of the advantages and disadvantages of

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-counterfeit-goods-are-from-china-2013-6>.

<sup>80</sup> "International Labor Comparisons: Manufacturing in China," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, last modified June 7, 2013, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.bls.gov/fls/china.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> "Employment in China," China Labour Bulletin, published June 22, 2013, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/content/employment-china>.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Kenny, "Why Factory Jobs Are Shrinking Everywhere," *Bloomberg Business*, published April 28, 2014, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-04-28/why-factory-jobs-are-shrinking-everywhere>.

industrialization, globalization, and mass production. The impact of living in a nascent culture of commodification and industry cannot be overemphasized. These factors, both historical and current, are cited with some regularity in the works of contemporary Chinese artists.

Chinese artists today operate within a very complex cultural and historical environment, where the legacy of Chinese copying practices may often seem at odds with the growth of mass production and counterfeit industries in the modern economy. While other international artists may comment on the commercialization of pop culture or even the 'Made in China' phenomenon, Chinese artists are in the unique position of reconciling their long and vaunted art historical tradition with a turbulent political past and an exciting, if a bit uncertain, economic present. Gao Minglu, a well-respected Chinese curator proposed what he viewed as three requirements for operating as a modern Chinese artist: "an artist must search for the principles of art making within specific Chinese cultural mechanisms; must learn from specific traditional philosophical concepts, aesthetic values, and techniques; and must develop experimental approaches to making art."<sup>83</sup> Three Chinese artists who excel at harnessing Chinese history to comment on the present are Cai Guo-Qiang, Ai Weiwei, and Zhou Tiehai. In particular, these artists make excellent use of studio assistants and varying combinations of mass production and fabrication techniques in order to highlight the central concerns of their works.

Fujian-born artist Cai Guo-Qiang holds a place in history as one of the first internationally known contemporary Chinese artists. Cai is best known for his

<sup>83</sup> Alexandra Munroe, *Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe, Exhibition Catalogue*, (Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2008), 20-41.

pyrotechnic displays and frequent use of gunpowder in his paintings as well as his performance pieces, but it was his controversial reproduction of the Maoist sculptural installation “Rent Collection Courtyard” that catapulted him to international fame extending beyond the art community. Cai held the honor of organizing the first ever China Pavillion at the 2005 Venice Biennale, and the Chinese government appointed the artist the lead orchestrator of all of the pyrotechnics for the Beijing Olympics in 2008.<sup>84</sup> Cai, who came of age in the midst of China’s Cultural Revolution, often turns to gunpowder as a source of healing, an embodiment of Chairman Mao’s saying, “No destruction, no creation.” The artist’s father was also an artist of sorts: an amateur ink painter who would paint tiny, intricate landscapes.<sup>85</sup> When discussing his father's work, Cai reflects, "Even though his works might appear splendid and grand, they lacked the spirit of breaking away from conventions and opposing them." <sup>86</sup> Cai’s experience growing up during the Cultural Revolution (and actually participating in some of the marches as a young boy) has afforded him a revolutionary mindset, where questioning authority can be considered a virtue. That being said, unlike some of his contemporaries, Cai proves to be generally non-ideological, adhering to “the laws of tolerance.” In his mind, an artist’s task is not to pass judgment, but rather to uncover a new reality, to teach a new mode of perception.<sup>87</sup> Cai’s work constantly pushes against facile binaries, like East vs. West, good vs. evil, destruction, vs. creation. His works are complex and

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "Cai Guo-Qiang on 'Brilliant Ideas'" Bloomberg.com, August 17, 2016, , accessed August 20, 2016, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2016-06-17/cai-guo-qiang-on-brilliant-ideas>.

<sup>87</sup> Munroe, 20-41.

many-layered, and most find their roots in Chinese historical, cultural, and artistic traditions. In the artist's own words, he seeks to "transform traditional iconographies with [his] own visual language."<sup>88</sup>

Cai references many different aspects of Chinese history and culture. Some of the many Eastern elements at play in Cai's works include cosmology, Daoism, traditional Chinese medicine, fengshui, Mao era politics, and literati style painting. When asked to name the most fundamental principles underlying his art, Cai explained,

There are...two doctrines I embrace in Daoist philosophy: "no law is the law", and "leveraging others' power to exert your own strength". In Confucianism, tolerance is a value that has taught me not to exclude others, and to learn from and work with people of different cultures; it enables me to find new possibilities in art. These underlying principles are the most valuable lessons I have learned from Eastern philosophy, and they are more important to me than superficial symbols (such as dragons), or even gunpowder as a choice of artistic medium.<sup>89</sup>

Taking his version of Confucian tolerance to heart, Cai often discusses the importance of accessibility to his art, claiming to see the world through the eyes of a child and creating works to shock and delight. Daoist principles of never-ending change abound in Cai's gunpowder works, which transform the very land and air. Additionally, the artist recalls being surrounded by discussions of the classical ideals of literati art as a child: "[My] family was always talking about the grandeur and

<sup>88</sup> Elena Cué, "Interview With Cai Guo-Qiang," February 23, 2015, accessed June 15, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elena-cue/interview-with-cai-guo-qiang\\_b\\_6738320.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elena-cue/interview-with-cai-guo-qiang_b_6738320.html).

<sup>89</sup> Alejandra De Argos, "Interview with Cai Guo-Qiang," Alejandra De Argos, September 15, 2014, accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.alejandradeargos.com/index.php/en/all-articles/21-guests-with-art/329-interview-cai-guo-qiang>.

accomplishment of Chinese art and civilization.”<sup>90</sup> Cai related that for his family, art appreciation constituted a spiritual communion of sorts with the great sages of the past.<sup>91</sup> Bearing in mind his Eastern influences, Cai still turns at times to the West and toward global themes. The artist describes the power his art derives from the wealth of Eastern and Western sources and contexts he can reference:

I am bringing chaos to time, to context, and to culture...I ignore the boundaries between different cultural heritages and freely navigate between Chinese, Eastern, and Western, or whatever world culture there is. I can take one out of context and put it into another, ignoring all boundaries and socially constructed constraints.<sup>92</sup>

It is Cai’s embrace of as many different contexts as he can that allows him to hone in on China-specific issues without risking hyper-focusing; his need to question as many different constructs as possible ensures that the work stays global, albeit with Chinese characteristics. In the artist’s own words: “Through my work, I explore my inherited culture and induce transformations into it.”<sup>93</sup>

Cai Guo-Qiang selectively references both Chinese history and contemporary mass production and art culture in one of his most famous works, “Venice Rent Collection Courtyard.” (Appendix C) “Venice’s Rent Collection Courtyard,” shown at the 48<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 1999, references a work produced during the Mao period entitled “Rent Collection Courtyard.” (Appendix A) The Mao era piece was commissioned by the Sichuan provincial government and executed by a team of sculptors from the Sichuan Institute of Fine Arts in 1965. <sup>94</sup> The goal of the

<sup>90</sup> Munroe, 20-41.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ellen Liang, *The Winking Owl* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 62.

sculptural installation was to commemorate the brutality of the landlords and the righteous anger of the peasants, both foundations for what the Communist Party of China (CCP) hoped would be an ongoing struggle against feudalism and capitalism. The installation itself was constructed inside the courtyard of a former landlord's mansion and depicted a lazy and entitled landlord demanding rent from the beleaguered peasants. "Rent Collection Courtyard" was widely publicized and soon duplicated in cities around the nation.<sup>95</sup> It is this seminal communist work that Cai Guo-Qiang chose to reproduce in its entirety at the 1999 Venice Biennale.

In addition to the change of venue, Cai's work differs from the original only in the title and certain simplifications to the sculptures. The artist placed an emphasis on the actual production of the sculptures, which visitors to the biennale could watch for the first few days. Cai hired a team of Chinese and Italian sculptors, including Long Xu Li, who had worked on the original installation in 1965, to recreate a portion of "Rent Collection Courtyard" for the length of the Biennale only. The clay was never fired, and the sculptures slowly cracked and disintegrated over the course of the exhibition, with all remaining portions destroyed at the close of the Biennale.<sup>96</sup> Although "Venice's Rent Collection Courtyard" was well received by Western art critics, receiving the Biennale's coveted Golden Lion Award, many Chinese criticized what they viewed as a direct act of plagiarism. Both the Sichuan Institute of Fine Arts and some of the original creators of the "Rent Collection Courtyard" sued Cai Guo-Qiang for copyright infringement, but the courts dismissed

<sup>95</sup> Liang, 62.

<sup>96</sup> "Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe," Guggenheim Arts Curriculum, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/teacher-resources/arts-curriculum-online?view=item&catid=727&id=94>.

the case.<sup>97</sup> Although some view this work as lazy profiteering, Cai's choice to replicate this piece should not be taken lightly, as Cai has gained a reputation as a dedicated, hands-on artist who often completes his own, highly original work and always works closely with the assistants who help him execute larger scale pieces. It is well documented that Cai often creates and mounts his own installations, as in the case of "Vine" in Buenos Aires (Appendix D), as well as his famed gunpowder drawings (Appendix E). Though Cai often relies on assistants to help him accomplish projects that are monumental in scale, the artist is nearly always present and in full command of both the design and execution of his works. Thus, one can safely expect that the decision to enact a work of art with no physical input from the artist was in this case well-considered and deeply intentioned.

In an interview with *The Brooklyn Rail* in 2008, Cai Guo Qiang noted that one of his goals is to pose the question: "What is the meaning of replicating such work that existed a long time ago?"<sup>98</sup> This could reference the potentially different interpretations of this work in terms of Western and Chinese value systems. In the Chinese tradition, the reproduction of a work solidifies its status as a masterpiece, and it is not likely to be considered as such until it is deemed worthy of duplication and transmission. Although this work had already been widely duplicated during the Mao era, Cai's choice to reproduce it conveys a sense of transcendental masterpiece status, which is complicated and potentially subverted by the decision to let the statues crumble and eventually be met with destruction. Although the

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ellen Pearlman, "In Conversation: Cai Guo-Qiang with Ellen Pearlman," *The Brooklyn Rail*, published April 4, 2008, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/04/art/cai-guo-qiang-with-ellen-pearlman>.

original installation was presented in a site-specific context of a former landlord's courtyard, the versions reproduced by the Communist government were placed in cities around China far removed from the original context of the rural landlord's property. While the installation in its original location may have held a certain sense of authenticity and poignancy as the site of a real landlord's excesses against peasants, the Chinese government's decision to reproduce the installation in cities across China took an even deeper dive into the realm of propaganda. Cai's decision to place the sculptures in an even more alien setting helps to highlight the ways that the installation has already been appropriated for political expediency and propaganda, slowly eroding the piece's original attempt at site-specific veracity and providing a wholly new context to "Rent Collection Courtyard." Perhaps by allowing the clay to crack and crumble, Cai was commenting on the erosion of the sculptures' honor and integrity by yet again moving the art out of its original context. Or perhaps the sculpture's disintegration echoes the decline of the Maoist legacy with the passage of time. Another possible interpretation is communism's failure to take hold in China, slowly being replaced by evermore powerful capitalist inclinations disguised as 'reform and opening up' and 'communism with Chinese characteristics.'

By hiring Chinese artists, including one of the original sculptors, Cai places the piece firmly within the context of Chinese history, but by also including Venetian artists, Cai adds a layer of complexity and inter-cultural commentary on Western views of Chinese history and art. Cai further explained his choice to reproduce the work by saying "The key is to focus on the process of fabrication of these artworks,



to pay attention to the process of the artists making these sculptures.”<sup>99</sup> Within the Western artistic tradition, there is typically less respect afforded to the duplication of a work of art, but interestingly, this piece was far better received in the West than in China. By contrast, there was a belief on the part of the Chinese art public and critics that Cai was merely pandering to the Western art establishment; in their eyes, using the Chinese mode of copying to produce a treasured national work out of context for a Western audience constitutes the worst possible affront to Chinese art history, just another ‘act of colonialism,’ to use the words of Alexandra Munroe.<sup>100</sup> In reality, however, Cai may have intended the reproduction of the piece to encourage criticism of the Western-dominated and overly commercialized art market. The fact that the Venice work was destroyed upon the close of the Biennale and neither sold nor placed into a museum collection underlines its stance against the commercialization of the art world. In a *New York Times* interview in 2014, Cai elaborated on his distaste for the “overly commercialized art world,” saying that it is crucial to “encourage Chinese artists to...focus a bit more on the process of artistic creation itself and put a bit more distance between themselves and the market.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, a conceptual piece which ostensibly lacks creativity and might at first glance appear to be an opportunistic knock-off (not even produced by the artist himself) actually uses the public duplication of a Chinese artwork by hired artisans to confer

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Munroe, 20-41.

<sup>101</sup> Becky Davis, "Q. and A.: Cai Guo-Qiang on Art, the Death of Nature and China's Modern Reality," *New York Times Sinosphere*, September 3, 2014, accessed March 18, 2015, [http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/q-and-a-cai-guo-qi-ang-on-art-the-death-of-nature-and-chinas-modern-reality/?\\_r=0](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/q-and-a-cai-guo-qi-ang-on-art-the-death-of-nature-and-chinas-modern-reality/?_r=0).

respect to the original installation (by highlighting its misuse over the years) and simultaneously criticize the commercialized art market, among other historical and cultural themes.

While Cai Guoqiang offered a subtle critique of the ever more commodified art world by creating a work that would never be bought or sold, another contemporary Chinese artist employs similar techniques of duplication and mass production to comment on the both the art industry and China's manufacturing boom by ostensibly embracing it. Zhou Tiehai has managed to become one of the most popular contemporary Chinese artists without lifting a hand in the physical production of his works, thus placing himself right in the middle of the debate on authorship and duplication. Unlike artists who use assistants for convenience and the ability to rapidly meet market demand (such as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons<sup>102</sup>), Zhou does so in order to critique the very market that has made him so famous.

Zhou first gained renown for a series of pieces openly critiquing the commodified art world. In one work entitled "Press Conference" (Appendix F), Zhou created a fake article in which the artist listed himself as a publicly traded stock (notably of a class only available for purchase by foreign investors) whose value was rising due to overseas investment.<sup>103</sup> Zhou's first series, called Placebo, incorporated the iconic image of Joe Camel from the American Camel cigarette company. Zhou took Joe Camel's head and placed it on the heads of various figures in classical paintings, all painted in acrylic using airbrush, which harkens back to the artist's

<sup>102</sup><http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303745304576357681741418282>.

<sup>103</sup>[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/arts/design/01zhou.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/arts/design/01zhou.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

earlier days working in the advertising industry. Zhou has said that he initially produced art that was deliberately 'un-Chinese' in order to appeal to the Western art market. Thus, he could infiltrate a market starved for original art with an unassuming 'placebo.'<sup>104</sup> Zhou's Placebo paintings were deliberately created not by the artist's own hand but rather by hired assistants, underlining the commercial element of the work. Zhou has said of his use of assistants: "I didn't see the need then, nor do I now, to make the paintings myself. It is the concept that is the creative part, and besides, most of the artists I know are not especially good painters, they are just famous."<sup>105</sup> While the first portion of Zhou's statement echoes many of the sentiments behind the Conceptual art movement, it is the second half that really underlines one of Zhou's driving principles: highlight the absurdity of the over-commercialization of the art market and the fame mongering of artists (by embracing that environment and fame in a very overt, in-your-face way). Beijing-based art critic Karen Smith refers to Zhou as "the child who dares to suggest the emperor is indeed naked."<sup>106</sup> Many others tout Zhou as the ultimate marketing maven, and indeed who could deserve the title more than an artist who became internationally famous by simply claiming that he was internationally famous?

As Zhou's career advanced, he began having his assistants create a series of copies and works inspired by classical Chinese masterpieces, all of which are

<sup>104</sup> "Zhou Tiehai: Placebo and Tonic," Ise Cultural Foundation, May 25, 2001, , accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.iseny.org/zhou-tiehai-placebo-and-tonic/>.

<sup>105</sup> Jon Burris, "Zhou Tiehai: It Is Not Difficult to Make Art," China Today, November 7, 2014, accessed August 2, 2016, [http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/culture/2014-11/07/content\\_650662\\_2.htm](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/culture/2014-11/07/content_650662_2.htm).

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/arts/design/01zhou.html>.

created using airbrushing, and none of which are handmade by the artist. Notable examples in his “Tonic Series” include “Autumn Waters Rippling (Southern Song Ma Yuan)” (Appendix H) and “Bamboo and Crane (Southern Song Mu Qi)” (Appendix I), both produced in 2001. These works reference the classical Chinese brush painting tradition by calling on common themes, like great poets and masters or bird and flower paintings, while also referencing the Chinese tradition of copying or painting in the style of another. Significantly, the original Chinese master who painted the work upon which Zhou’s piece is based is always credited in the Chinese title of the work, as well as the dynasty in which it was created. “Bamboo and Crane” is a particularly interesting example of Zhou’s ancient copies because unlike some of the other paintings, which make only minor changes to the composition, “Bamboo and Crane” is actually a replica of only one part of a famous triptych by Muqi depicting a crane with bamboo on the left panel, a monkey and its baby on the right, and a depiction of the bodhisattva Guanyin all in white in the center piece. This original mural is currently in the Daitokuji Temple in Kyoto and has been designated a national treasure by the government of Japan. By taking just one section of the triptych and placing it out of context, Zhou alerts Chinese viewers of the painting that this piece has been intentionally reproduced and recontextualized. This is not just a knock-off; there is more at play here. When discussing the Tonic Series, Zhou explained, “Tonic is a traditional drug that Chinese people take everyday for their health” and commented that his “new “Tonic” is very effective for Chinese who are afraid of Westernization” because the work take the form of traditional Chinese

paintings.<sup>107</sup> The implication in Zhou's statement is that a work that is deeply, inherently Chinese in its origins can still be 'westernized' by the context in which it is presented (the global art market), the people who buy it (international art investors), and the way it caters to those people and that market.

"Autumn Waters Rippling" is based off of a late twelfth century painting by famed landscape painter Ma Yuan. Ma created an album of twelve different scenes exploring different manners of representing water in its various forms, a number of which were reproduced by Zhou's team. Like many other traditional Chinese artists, Ma Yuan first emulated the style of other masters, especially Li Tang, before eventually developing a style that could be considered his own.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Ma Yuan was one of those artists whose style was often emulated, making attributions for his works very tricky. The choice to reproduce an artist so commonly copied makes for an excellent point. Why should Zhou's replica be any different than those of previous painters or be afforded any less regard? In fact, his works take the conceptual argument much further than simply echoing Chinese traditions of emulation.

Were Zhou just to have his assistants paint replicas of old Chinese paintings, that might stand alone as a commentary on Chinese art history, but the use of airbrushing places the pieces in a thoroughly modern, more commercial context, with the act of replication simultaneously acknowledging China's legacy of copying. The airbrushing nearly imitates the look of a brush stroke, but the blurring at the

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.iseny.org/zhou-tiehai-placebo-and-tonic/>.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Sullivan, "Ma Yuan," Encyclopedia Britannica Online, accessed August 2, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ma-Yuan-Chinese-painter>.

edges of the lines results in a painting that looks as though it were being viewed through a thin layer of fog or water (especially appropriate for the Ma Yuan copy), indicating to the viewer that this is not intended as a mere facsimile. Airbrushing is an invention of the modern era commonly used in the production of t-shirts and automobiles. The use of airbrushing facilitates both speed and precision, which makes it a perfect tool for mass production, and the use of assistants to create these works further underlines the reference to China's manufacturing and knockoff culture, as well as to the modern commodification of art and global branding of artists. Zhou Tiehai openly admits that his primary goal was "to show people how easy it is to make art."<sup>109</sup> His work successfully criticizes a world where an artist can become famous by openly mocking the very institutions that support him, as in the case of "Press Conference." Furthermore, Zhou manages to comment on a culture that has historically respected copying as a display of skill and creative vitality and has currently shifted to a wholesale embrace of mass production and replication.

Ai Weiwei, who is perhaps the most internationally famous Chinese artist at the moment, also favors a hands-off approach that often references current Chinese mass production culture within the framework of Chinese history. Although much of Ai Weiwei's work centers on his political activism, his most effective works are more complex and subtle, with multiple potential meanings that must be slowly teased out. Ai Weiwei has been labeled a conceptual artist by many, and whether the label is appropriate or not, he has been greatly influenced by Conceptual art and in particular, its forebear Marcel Duchamp. Ai Weiwei left China and lived in New

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/arts/design/01zhou.html>.

York for over a decade, where he was exposed to the art scene and made early pieces referencing Duchamp and his work with readymades.<sup>110</sup> Ai has said, "Actually I have very little involvement in the production of my works. I mainly make decisions. I prefer others to implement my ideas."<sup>111</sup> He elaborated on his view of art, saying, "Being an artist is more of a mindset, a way of seeing things; it is no longer so much about producing something...After Duchamp, I realized that being an artist is more about a lifestyle and attitude than producing some product."<sup>112</sup> Ai has described tradition as a readymade, saying "It's for us to make a new gesture— to use it as a reference, more as a starting point than conclusion."<sup>113</sup> Many of Ai's pieces do make use of the 'tradition readymade,' relying heavily on Chinese history, art, and culture. The work that launched Ai's career in 1995, "Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn", can be considered a performance piece that incorporated a readymade in the form of an antique urn, which Ai dropped to the ground and shattered. The piece raised questions of the legacy of Chinese art, the current conservation practices of the Communist party, and just what power and meaning China's history still holds for its people. References to history and memory always linger in Ai Weiwei's art as he pushes viewers to consider how China can reconcile its great past when faced with what the artist deems a less than ideal present. He said, "I try to encourage people to look at our past in a critical way because as our education, we have a great, great history. But in reality we are poorest in ethics and

<sup>110</sup> Uli Sigg et al., *Ai Weiwei* (Köln: Taschen, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> Klayman, Alison. *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*. 2012. Film.

<sup>112</sup> Ai Weiwei, *Weiwei-isms*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), ProQuest ebrary, accessed July 21, 2016, 80.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

philosophy, so I try to raise people's consciousness on how we deal with our past."<sup>114</sup> Ai makes a convincing case for the uniqueness of the Chinese cultural contest,

Over the last one hundred years, China has experienced political, economic, and cultural calamities not comparable to those of any other nation or country. The deep historical and cultural causes of all these wrenching transformations, and the political and cultural complexities and possibilities brought on by these changes, are unique in human history. The arbitrary, chaotic, uncertain, and changeable elements in Chinese culture (which are rooted in the Chinese people's understanding of their place within nature) are precisely what so often lend it its miraculous powers of recovery. They allow it to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, and to find new life on the brink of death.<sup>115</sup>

As much as Ai's work is replete with stinging critiques of Chinese culture and politics, he is still driven by a deep love of country and a desire to find a way to explore the issues he deems most important to China, one of which is how to reconcile the glorious and often painful past with the present and move forward towards a more just future.

One of Ai's most striking pieces manages to incorporate a deeply complex allusion to the past and present nature of factory production in China. It also draws a somewhat ironic, connection between the common description of Mao as the sun and all his loyal followers as sunflowers and the fact that many Chinese, including a young Ai Weiwei, relied on sunflower seeds for nutrition during the trying times of famine and scarcity during Mao's reign. "Sunflower Seeds," first shown at the Tate Modern's grand Turbine Hall in 2010 featured approximately 100 million handmade

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>115</sup> Ai Weiwei and Lee Ambrozy, *Writing Art: Ai Weiwei's Blog: Writings, Interviews, and Digital Rants, 2006-2009*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), ProQuest ebrary, July 21, 2016.



porcelain sunflower seeds, collectively weighing in at 150 tons<sup>116</sup>. The seeds covered the floor of the Turbine Hall, creating a space both eerily calm and overwhelming in its scale (Appendix G). The overall effect of the work owes much to its physical presence, but the story behind the production of the seeds provokes an even more worthwhile dialogue among viewers.

The 100 million sunflower seeds were produced in a Chinese town called Jingdezhen, which has a long history of porcelain craftsmanship. Approximately 1600 artisans took two and a half years to produce the seeds by hand. The clay comes from kaolin found in local mountains which is processed, refined, molded, fired, and then hand painted in an elaborate thirty step procedure.<sup>117</sup> Ai Weiwei's delegation of this task to skilled Chinese artisans in the town that once made the porcelain for the Imperial family imparts deep meaning to the piece and as such, proves absolutely central to its power as a conceptual work of art. Ostensibly the production of 100 million sunflower seeds in a factory-style setting would seem to draw connections to modern mass production in China. The piece might imply that if one wants something produced quickly, cheaply, effectively, and above all, in bulk, then China is the place to go--even for a Chinese artist who often criticizes the overly Westernized commodification of the Chinese Culture, as Ai Weiwei did with his self-explanatory "Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo" (1994). Ai has said before: "You can see China still cannot offer any real value to the world except as cheap

<sup>116</sup> *Ai Weiwei: Sunflower Seeds*, Tate Media in partnership with The Unilever Series, 2012, Documentary Film, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-ai-weiwei-sunflower-seeds>.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

labor, manufacturer, and its own so-called stability,”<sup>118</sup> implying that this work could easily stand as a critique of mass production culture, but as is usually the case with Ai Weiwei’s work, there is more to the story.

Upon further investigation of the production of the seeds, it becomes clear that this process used little mechanization and relied mainly on traditional artisanal techniques. The clay was mined by Chinese laborers, pounded and refined using a traditional mill to harness waterpower, hand packed into molds, fired, and finally hand-painted using classic Chinese hair brushes and glaze. At no point was there ever a conveyor belt or official assembly line procedure. There were no uniforms, no shift supervisors, and no highly corporate Foxconn-like setup. In fact, upon watching the film recorded by Ai Weiwei and his studio (and later produced into a documentary by the Tate Modern) on their many visits to Jingdezhen, the workers sat around round tables, chatting and painting. There were no set hours; workers were paid by the weight of seeds they produced, and some women chose to work out of home so they could better care for their families while they supplemented their income with seed painting. Although the end result of 100 million seeds screams ‘mass production,’ the means hardly seem so.

This piece raises many questions about the nature of production. What is mass production? Does it have a set of specific characteristics or is it the end result that categorizes the process? How has China changed, and how has it remained the same? What is the fate of artisans like these in a globalizing and mechanizing economy? All of these inquiries rely specifically on the means of production for

<sup>118</sup> Ai Weiwei, *Weiwei-isms*, 85.

their conveyance; had Ai Weiwei and his studio produced the seeds themselves or had the artist been from a Western country, or even a different province in China, the meaning would be entirely changed. Had Ai Weiwei chosen a more factory-like setting or a different medium, like plastic, for the seeds, the piece would have a completely different character. In this way, the artist's specific cultural background allowed him to create a unique work of art that cannot be removed from its various historical and contemporary influences except to the detriment of the work. In this instance, as with Zhou Tiehai's airbrushed classical masterpieces, adding the 'touch of the artist' would have tainted the conceptual depth of the piece, removing complexity rather than adding intrinsic value.

In the age of grand-scale installation art, the choices of the artist matter more than ever, as does his or her background. Art is not produced in a vacuum, and it is impossible to divorce an artist's work from its cultural and historical context. In this way artists such as Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-Qiang, and Zhou Tiehai's status as Chinese citizens puts them in a unique and rather powerful position to comment on the effects of duplication and mass production within their cultures, both in the past and present. The debate on studio production techniques will likely never be definitively resolved; it is too wrapped up in the subjective definitions of 'art' and 'authorship.' That being said, there are cases where an artwork's means of production can enhance the piece by highlighting or drawing attention to the underlying concepts behind the art. In instances where an artist seeks to comment on specific aspects of mass production, consumer culture, or particular historical events or practices, the use of studio assistants and relevant fabrication techniques

can be absolutely crucial to creating the most effective work possible. Bearing this in mind, it could be said that no one better is suited than Chinese artists to harness mass production techniques in order to effectively comment on the ways in which a globalized economy and mass consumer culture can deeply transform a society, for better or worse. A consensus regarding the impact of delegated production on authorship may never be reached, but works like those by Cai Guo-Qiang, Ai Weiwei, and Zhou Tiehai make it more and more difficult to outright dismiss the merits of such practices.

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# Appendix A



Sol LeWitt, "A Wall Divided Vertically into 15 Equal Parts, Each with a Different Line Direction and Colour, and All Combinations." Tate London. 1970.

## Appendix B



Joseph Kosuth. "One and Three Chairs." MoMa. 1965.

## Appendix C



“Rent Collection Courtyard” Ye Yushan, et. al. Sculptural Installation, Sichuan. 1965.





## Appendix D



“Venice Rent Collection Courtyard.” Cai Guo-Qiang. Sculptural Installation/Performance piece. Venice Biennale. 1999.



## Appendix E



Cai Guo-Qiang installing "Vine," a sculptural installation, at the Fundacion Proa in Buenos Aires. 2014.



## Appendix F



Cai Guo-Qiang preparing a gunpowder drawing for the Arts of China Gallery at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts in October, 2010.



# Appendix G

## Shanghai

When first listed July 12 on the Shanghai Stock exchange, Zhou Tiehai appeared undervalued, rising only slightly in the first few hours of trade.

But Class B\* shares in the issue appreciated steadily over the next two weeks, as foreign buyers learned more about the enterprise's fundamentals. One European buyer even was rumoured to be accumulating large blocks of the stock in a bid to obtain a majority stake, traders said.

The gradual appreciating accelerated into an all-out buying spree beginning on July 26, when the unnamed European buyer discovered previously undisclosed assets in Zhou Tiehai. The stock closed out the month just below a psychological high. Traders then said they doubted the stock would rise much further.

"If the Zhou climbs much higher it will find itself very vulnerable to market fluctuations and exposed to the whims of profit-takers," said a marked analyst with a Shanghai-based securities firm.

Yet an injection of new funds on Aug. 6 caused the stock to soar on strong buying again rumoured to originate from Europe. The initial surge was followed by three to four days of consolidation in the value of the stock. Traders said it was a technical correction, ending on Aug. 10.

The Zhou fell slowly over the next few sessions, as the European buyer, realizing its investment had become overvalued, took some profits.

By Aug. 13 the Zhou had fallen to more sustainable level, before its shares were suspended from trading ahead of a shareholder meeting.

When trading resumed Aug. 26, the Zhou took a slight knock, consolidating on Aug. 27 to a level just below its pre-suspension price.

According to market participants, the stock is now valued fairly in the eyes of the big houses and seems likely to remain stable in the foreseeable future.

Its fundamentals remain sound, and bullish traders expect renewed interest by overseas buyers to bring the Zhou Tiehai higher in the long term. Indeed, some traders said they have seen indications in recent sessions that foreign houses are accumulating the Zhou again.

\* Shanghai has two stock markets. Class B shares are denominated in US dollars and tradable only by overseas investors. Class A shares. Dominated in yuan, are available only to domestic Chinese buyers.



"Press Conference." Zhou Tiehai. Print (signed edition, 1 of 100). 1997.

## Appendix H



“Autumn Waters Rippling (Southern Song Ma Yuan).” Zhou Tiehai. Acrylic airbrush on canvas. 2001.



Based on: “Autumn Waters Rippling.” Ma Yuan. Ink. 1190-1224 AD.

## Appendix I



“Bamboo and Crane Southern Song Mu Qi” Zhou Tiehai. Airbrush on canvas. 2001.



Based on: “Bamboo and Crane” “Guan Yin” “Monkey and Baby on Pine Branch” Mu Qi. Ink on silk. Early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

## Appendix J



“Sunflower Seeds.” Ai Weiwei. Site specific installation of porcelain sunflower seeds. Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, London. 2010.



**Appendix K**



“Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo.” Ai Weiwei. Paint on a Han Dynasty urn.  
1994.