

No movements or signs of modulation. No nothing but the random and anarchic display of images, intermittent blank pages asserted for no purpose except a pause or absence, and bright stretches of color made up of pencil sharpenings of pure pigment which create the affective content of the work.

The musician is confronted by this absence and has to go inside herself or himself to compose a personal score. As such this work requires an extreme of self-interpretation.

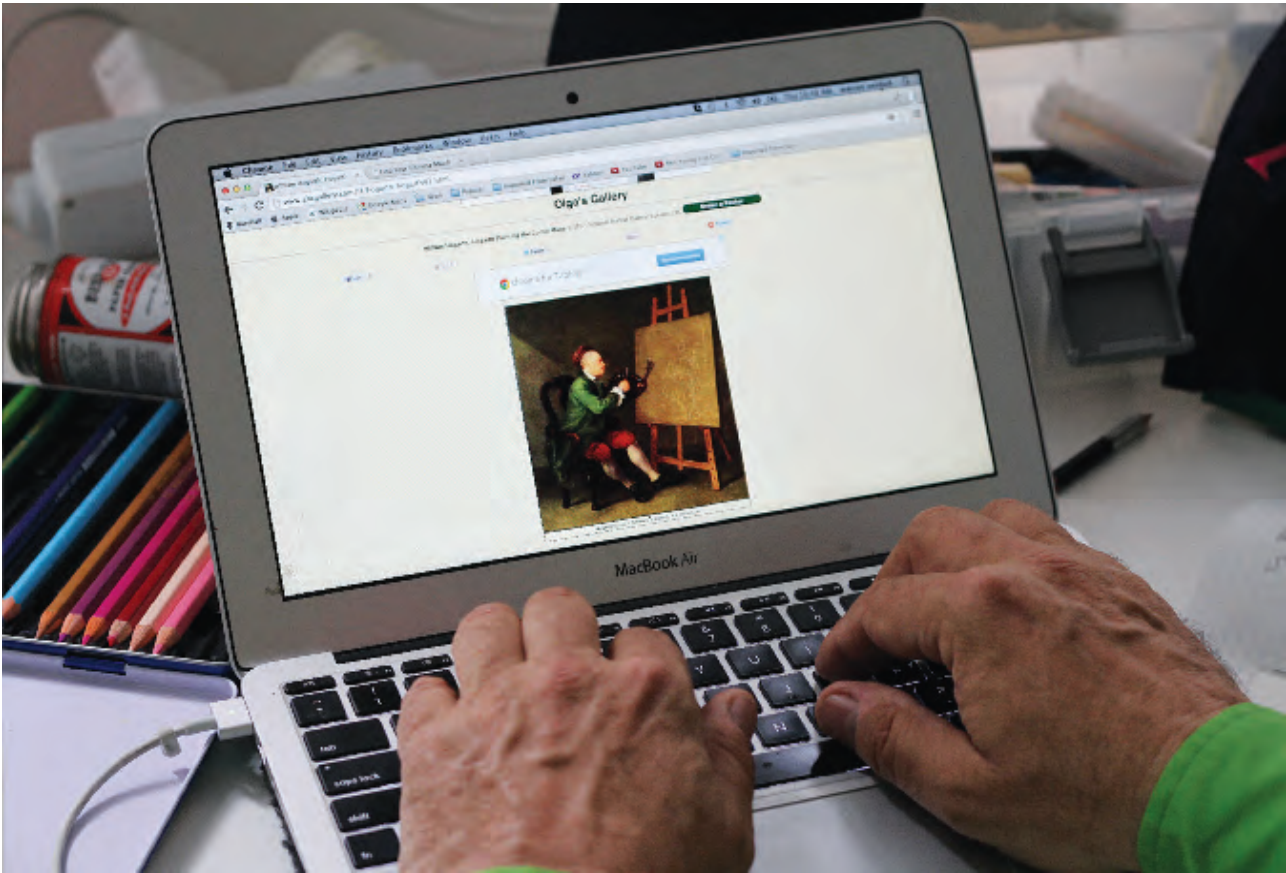
¹ Roberts, John. *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*, London/New York: Verso 2007.

THE EDUCATION OF THE EYE

INSTRUCTIONS

EACH PROFESSIONAL PAINTER WAS GIVEN THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS.

- 1. THEY WERE TO OBSERVE A COPY OF WILLIAM HOGARTH'S SELF-PORTRAIT, 1757, HUNG ON THE WALL OF MY STUDIO FOR THREE HOURS.
- 2. THEY WERE ALL GIVEN A WOODEN PALETTE THAT WAS SIMILAR TO THE ONE FOUND IN THE PAINTING.
- 3. DURING THE THREE-HOUR TIME INTERVAL THEY WERE ASKED TO TO FILL IN A GRID OF SEVENTY-TWO SQUARE BOXES, DRAWN DIRECTLY ON THE PALETTE, WITH MIXTURES OF ACRYLIC PAINT THAT CLOSELY MATCHED THOSE FOUND IN THE PAINTING.
- 4. THEY WERE GIVEN ALL THE COLORS OF ACRYLIC PAINT THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO COMPLETE THIS TASK.
- 5. THE LIGHTING CONDITIONS WOULD ALWAYS BE 3200 KELVIN.
- 6. THEY WERE NOT GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO FILL THE GRID IN AND THE NUMBER OF BOXES FILLED IN WAS ALSO LEFT TO THEM.
- 7. THEY WOULD BE GIVEN A SIX-PACK OF BEER FOR THEIR TROUBLE.



The Education of the Eye, 2009-2012, gets its name from the explanation found in J. C. Friedrich Von Schiller's (1759-1805) *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1794. The production of the self-portrait painting as it was performed in front of a mirror reflected not only the body of the painter, his or her face and garments but also his or her color appreciation and preferences. The palette, when present, mirrored these partialities, with its ordered arrangements of painterly hues. Historically, these palettes were made of wood and presented a surface for the rapid mixing of colors. In many cases artists were extremely strategic in the manner in which they arranged colors for maximum efficiency of applying paint to a nearby canvas. The ordering of the colors and their selection represented deep seeded conditions of taste and therefore reflected implicit states of subjectivity.

This investigation which began in my studio and then travelled to Belgrade, Dafen (China), and Los Angeles evolved from Neidich's investigation of color to one which dealt with the following issues: the self-portrait, the nature of painting, rule-based art, outsourcing, global economies, the economy of the copy, cultural labor, alternative art markets, and the difference between reproduction and differentiation.



① LABORATORY

② PRODUCTION OF THE PICTURE

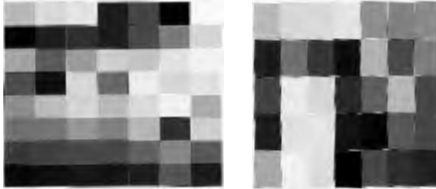
③ EXPERIMENT



④

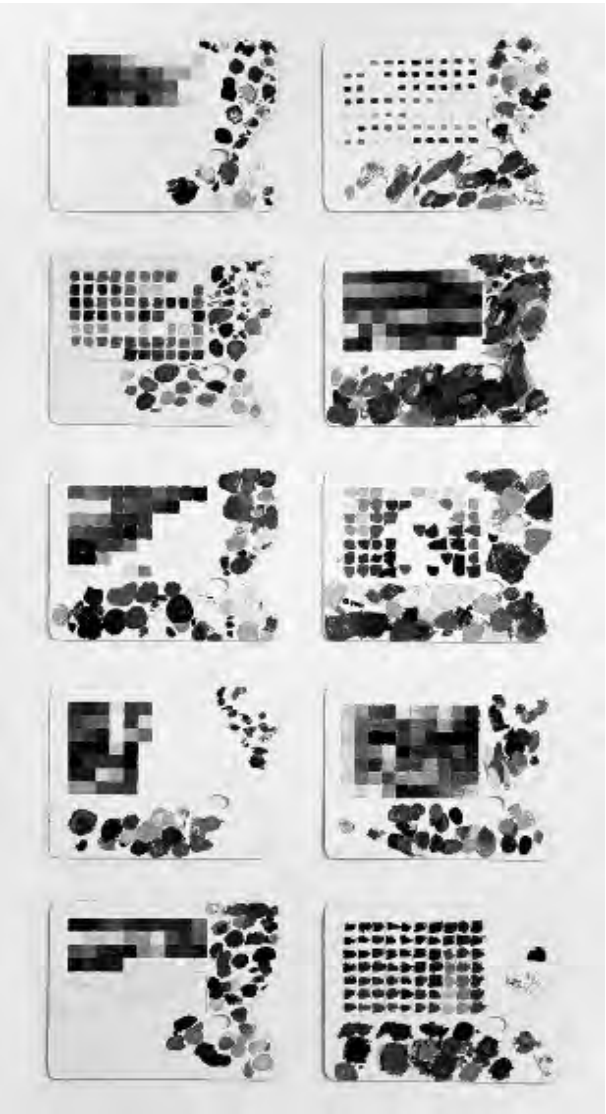


⑤





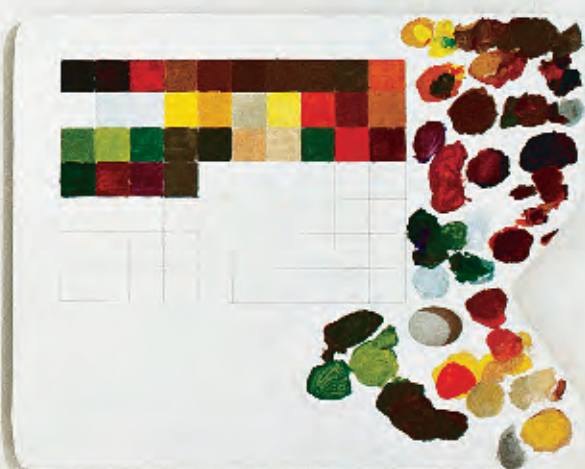
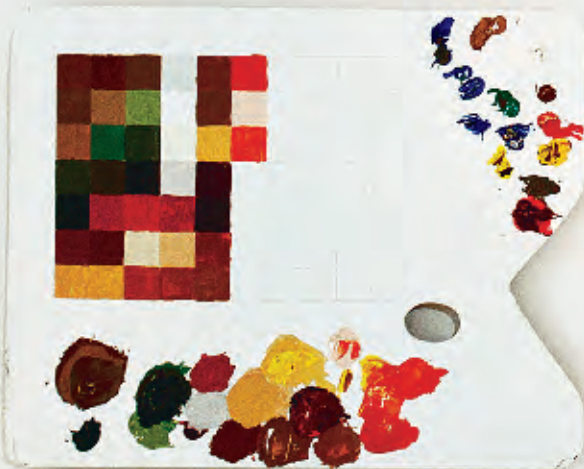
In *The Education of the Eye*, Neidich's Berlin studio became a laboratory to explore the multiplicitous and emancipatory potential of the rule as it had been previously initiated by Norbert Weiner in his book *Cybernetics* and then adapted by Sol Lewitt in his famous injunction: "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." In the case of Lewitt the rule always produced the same work of art no matter the conditions and site of its production. In *The Education of the Eye*, Berlin, a set of rules had a very different effect. Instead of producing a homogenous body of work distributed in a multiplicity of contexts these rules unleashed and emancipated perceptual and cognitive dispositions of the artist worker producing a variety of very different and heterogeneous outcomes rather than the same one.





Each palette varied in a number of ways.

- 1. Colors mixed and matched by some artists were unique. Notice that in the palette in the right lower corner the color violet appears and is absent in the rest of the palettes.
- 2. The number of colors discovered varied greatly from 34 to 72.
- 3. The array of the colors followed two distinct patterns: the artists either used a rigorous analytic method in which each color's hue were represented across their color spectrum or else they chose to perform the task intuitively with the colors meandering around the palette without a plan.



What makes Dafen a unique place is that it is at the center of an alternative art market and world with its own caste of characters and rules. The entire city is organized around one central theme: the artisanal production and internet distribution of the copied painting. Orders from buyers of paintings seen on internet sites come in from all over the world are taken by agents who manage the websites and whom enlist the competences of “so-called” copy artists working in small painting factories and ateliers to mimic the original artworks, in this case, William Hogarth’s *Self-portrait*.





Top: *Entrance*, 2010
Bottom: *Post-Pop Art*, 2010

The Education of the Eye: Dafen, China by Julia Wirxel

Based on a complex conceptual blueprint, *The Education of the Eye* project takes shape in a process that plays out in various media and several places. For each component, Warren Neidich collaborates with selected local protagonists, integrating them into his performances in concrete ways based on their artistic skills and craftsman's expertise. The first part of the project took place in Neidich's Berlin studio. The second part was implemented in Dafen, China. The latest manifestation was performed together with documentary materials from the first two parts and exhibited at the Belgrade Cultural Center, in Serbia, under the title *Acceptable Differences*.

In this work, Neidich proposes a set of rules in order to accomplish two things: first to draw attention to the history of rule-based art works, such as those initiated by Sol LeWitt, while at the same time proposing a very different outcome. Instead of producing the same work in a variety of settings (and I am thinking here of LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #65*), *The Education of the Eye* concerns and uncovers differences while emancipating visual perception from institutional contexts and constraints. The project's construction is designed to tease out and to facilitate an analysis of differences in visual perception, especially in the discernment of color across various social, political, and cultural systems.

And this is where we come back to Dafen, China, and the initiation of the project. Neidich had gone online and ordered a painted copy of William Hogarth's *Self-portrait* (1757) from a studio in Dafen, a city renown for hosting a slew of painters who make replicas of famous paintings.

In Berlin, after receiving the Chinese version of the Hogarth, Neidich invited ten painters with solid technical training to his studio to contemplate this copy on different days, for three hours, under similar lighting conditions. After studying and analyzing the painting's colors, each of the artists applied the colors they perceived onto a palette, but in the form of a grid. Each was given a six-pack of beer for the labor. The end result was that the hues perceived diverged widely. A wonderful magenta was found on only one painter's palette, making evident that each artist had different perceptual responses to the same stimulus. The painters also managed their arrangement of the colors very differently on the palettes, tending either toward a highly rigid formal rendition or applying the paints in a fairly intuitive and disorganized manner.

Together with the Dafen experience, to be elaborated upon below, the Berlin studio experiment raised the following questions: How is information assimilated in the perception and execution of a specific painting, and what is the role of the political, social, and cultural climate in instrumentalizing and normalizing that process? Are social influences discernible in the manner in which the pictures painted on demand are implemented and executed? Are there limitations to perception that distinguish the Western from the Eastern eye? What would an interaction between these perspectives look like? Finally, what do the painterly practices originating in Dafen (i.e., the copying of paintings) tell us about the intricacies and evolution of the art market on the local and global scale?

In the next step, Neidich had decided to visit the city of Dafen in order to familiarize himself with the methods and working environments of its manufacturers.



Top: *Magic Painting*, 2010
Bottom: *Family Business*, 2010

There he discovered Mr. Wu's Atelier, which specializes in copying European masterpieces. He decided to have another copy of the Hogarth produced, this time in his presence, resulting in a painting of better quality than the one he had bought online.

During his time in Dafen, he befriended two professional Chinese copy painters who were subsequently invited to repeat the performative experiment first conducted in Neidich's Berlin studio. He had brought his studio lights with him as well as the same assortment of acrylic tube paints and palettes that he had used in the original experiment. What differences would now come to light? Could the experiment disclose dissimilarities related to the political and social conditions of Euro Capitalism with its emphasis on neoliberalism as opposed to those created by the Chinese context with its more authoritarian and socialized market system? The results, in the end, were not unlike that of the experiment in his studio in Berlin. There were radical differences in each artists' choice of color palette: one was filled with bright oranges and yellows while the other was more dark with a predominance of browns and reds. There were also major differences in the way their palettes were organized: one artist used the intuitive method and the other a more rigorous organized display. Other components of this project include a series of photographs, exhibited as a slide show, which analyses the different social, political, historical, and economic conditions that form the setting for this unique Dafen experience. Neidich had ventured into the back alleys to show the workers making the canvases, frames, and crates used in the production of the copied paintings. He also entered different ateliers to show the various artists at work, and he documented the final phase of this global industry, showing agents in their offices making deals with foreign customers.

Neidich also made a number of videos during his visit. In *Painting Flag* (2010), he hired a painter to reproduce Jasper John's *Flag* (1954-1955). The video documents its production and includes a series of interviews about the artists' feelings about copying paintings for a living and his attitude about the United States. In the show, "In the Mind's I Dafen," he collaborated with a Chinese artist to make an imaginary exhibition in the mind's eye of that artist. This incidentally was a work that he had been also conducting for the past three years in many museums, galleries, and festivals. Finally, *Making of the Hogarth Painting* (2010) is a detailed examination of the making of his Hogarth painting during his trip in Dafen, from its examination on the internet, to its initial processing as a computer print on canvas, to its actual production and stretching in Mr. Wu's Atelier. Again the artist uses interviews with the local workers at every stage in the production to add special insights and feelings to the painting process itself.



Top: *Obama/Mao*, 2010
Bottom: *Venice Art*, 2010



Top: *Post-Modern Studio*, 2010
Bottom: *Sidewalk*, 2010

The video *Making of the Hogarth Painting* is the story of the step-by-step production of the copied Hogarth self-portrait painting. The viewer is taken on a short odyssey through the streets of Dafen as the painting is made, and along the way meeting the cast of characters responsible for its assembly.





First of all, I mainly make the copies.



There are different ways of receiving orders.



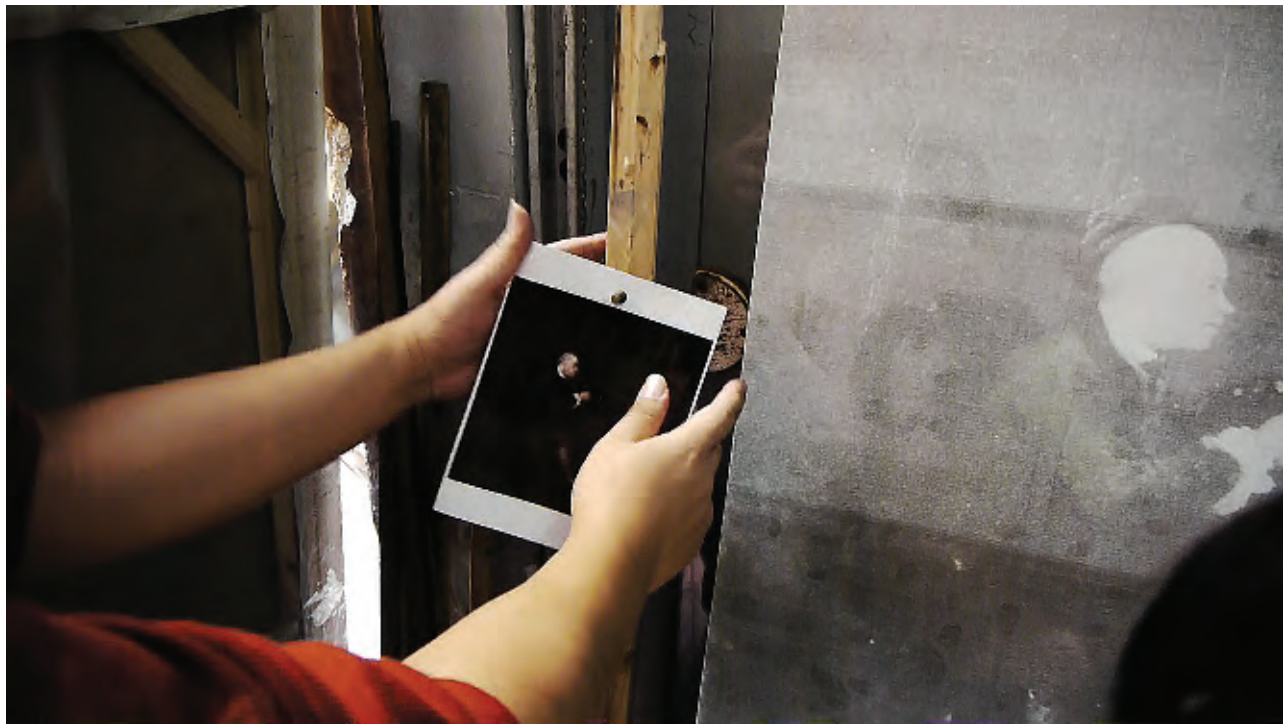
Reviewing the Hogarth self-portrait on the internet and discussing the project.



Outside of the Digital Printing Shop



Studing the half-tone black-and-white print of the painting.



Copy painter examining rendition of the Hogarth self-portrait.



Painting directly upon the digital half-tone print.



Working with other copy painters in Mr. Wu's atelier.



Continuing the painting.



Finishing the painting.



Adding the final touches.



Spraying and shellacking the painting.

After the painting was finished, two of the expert copy painters were asked if they would be willing to participate in the same experiment which had been carried out in Neidich's Berlin Studio. Would the cultural conditions of this alternative location affect the results? Would the fact that these painters were experts in color matching skew the outcome? They agreed and Neidich and crew were invited to their home/studios where a similar set up was installed.

Two large stretched canvases separated the painters so that each would not see the others' work and the same photographic light that had been used in Berlin was mounted on a tripod stand and switched on.

Again, as before, the painters were given three hours to accomplish the task. The results shown on page 104 and 105 matched those from Berlin. Again great differences in the color choices of the palettes can be appreciated as well as the methods in which the colors were applied. The palette on the left is done in a more intuitive way perhaps matching the color distributions in the painting whereas the artist uses a more rationalized and calculated way to fill in the grid.





As was found formerly in the Berlin experience, an analysis of the two palettes suggests two very different color appreciations and ways of formatting and structuring the colors.

