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- [Food](#)
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- [Photography](#)
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- [Travel »](#)

February 16, 2009

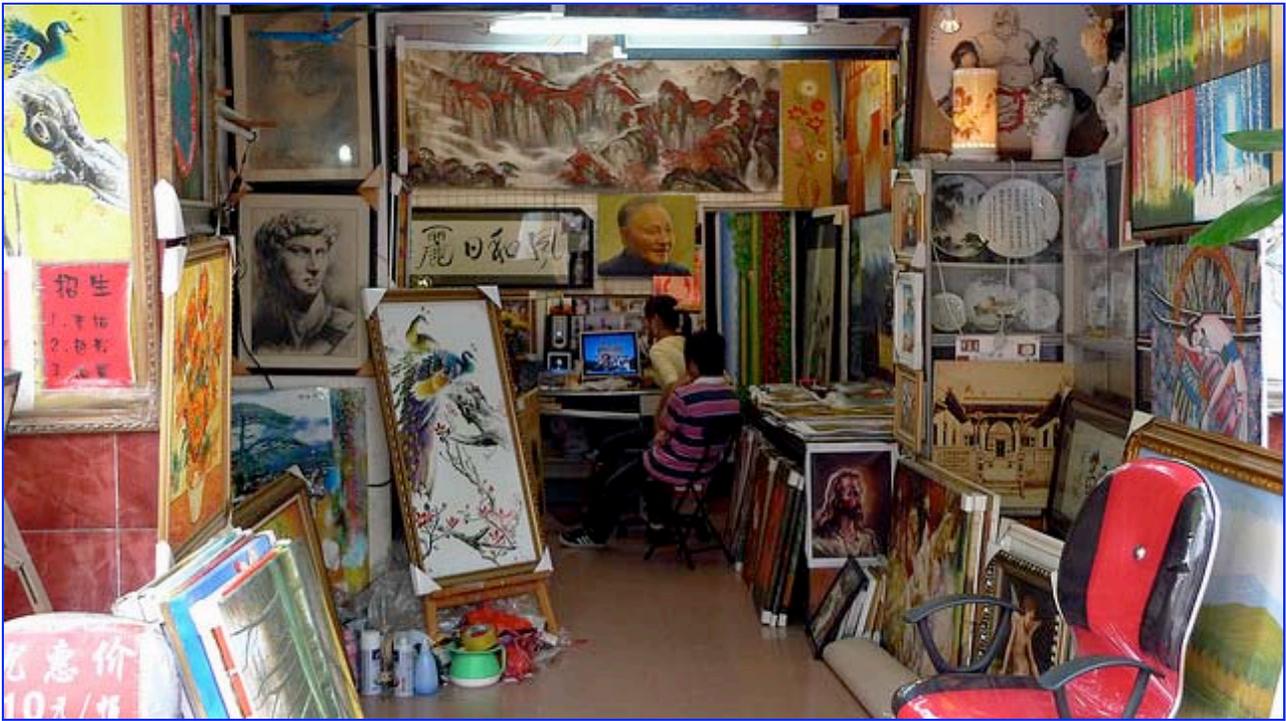
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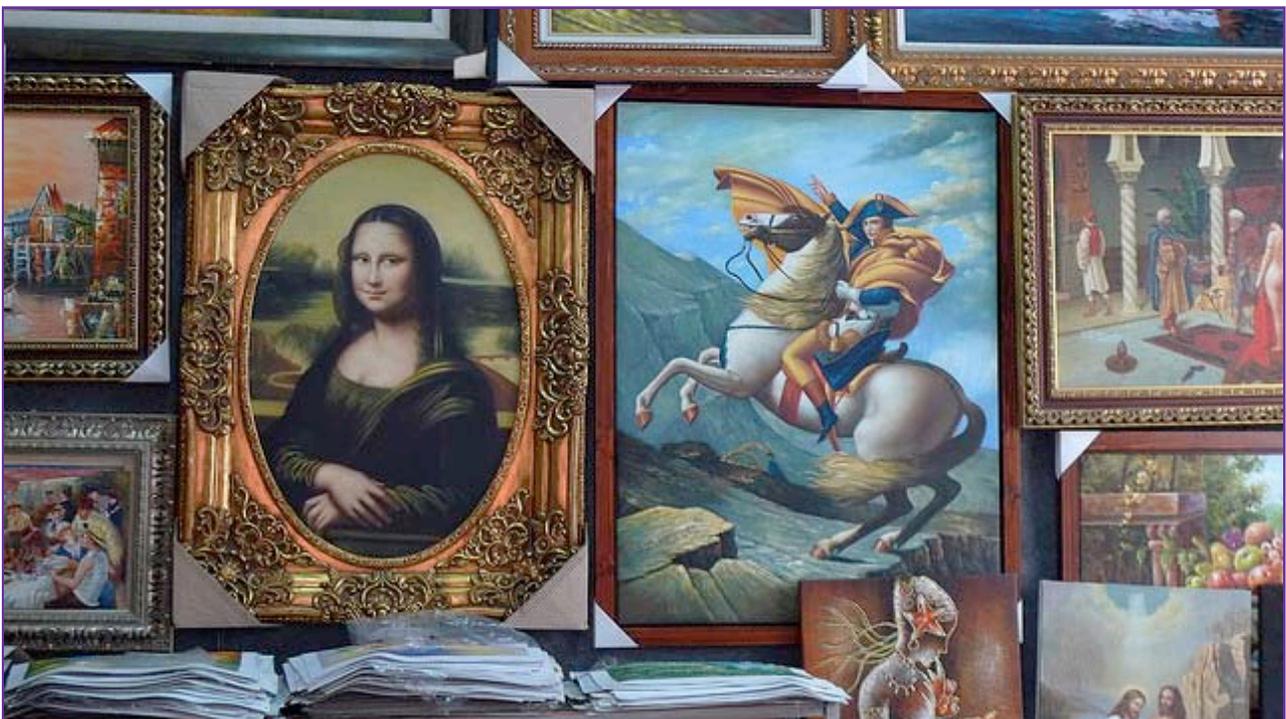


Dafen Oil Painting Village

China is well known for all manor of fakery – be it consumer electronics, clothing, pharmaceuticals, DVDs, food and just about anything else you can imagine. They even have a word for these products; *shanzhai* (山寨).



Last weekend I took a trip to see [Dafen Oil Painting Village](#) whose sole purpose is basically to [mass produce](#) copies of [western art](#) to be sold to shops, restaurants, hotels, galleries, and tasteless consumers across the world. Located in [Longgang District](#), Shenzhen the village boasts over 5,000 artists working in 600+ galleries who churn out over 5 million paintings each year. Needless to say that's a lot of paintings!



Masquerading as an artistic community of sorts the endeavour is clearly one of a business rather than anything remotely artistic in the true sense of the word. The quality of the work is dubious at best yet it remains a fascinating place if only as a curiosity in a land where they don't do things by

halves.



From the [Mona Lisa](#) to [Van Gogh](#), David Beckham, world leaders/dictators and vulgar nudes this place has it all in bulk.

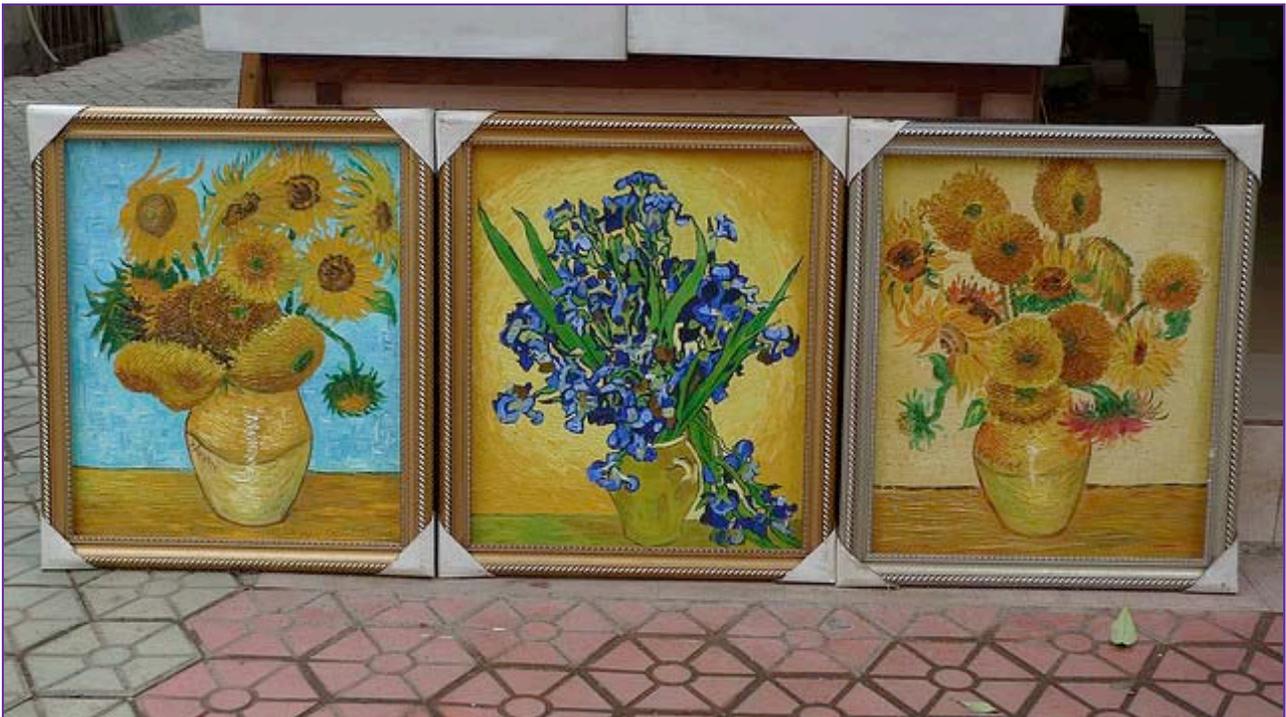


Wandering around an area saturated with hand-produced copies of the worlds most famous art I was reminded of a subtle link to one of my [favourite](#) philosophic concepts; [hyperreality](#):

The fluid reality that spans the territory between the real and the fake, between simulations and the hyperreal, between the authentic and counterfeit, is the slippery

territory where we all now live. This blurred continent is [Philip K. Dick](#)'s universe, and the land of [reality TV](#), and the home of pirates. There is something deeply disturbing about our inability to tell real from unreal (who can discern a fake diamond from real?), or to care about it. As the post-modernists maintain, sometimes the fake is so real, it becomes realer than real (hyperreal) and we come to prefer it. [Source: [CT2](#)]

Thanks to Defan the world is now populated with enough fake Mona Lisa's to confuse even the most persistent [Da Vinci code](#) hunters! In China the line between what is real and what is reproduction is rarely clear-cut from a layman's perspective. Personally I still can't understand why anyone would want a soulless fake but it's clearly good business. Taste on the other hand cannot be brought.



You can find Dafen by taking bus 306 from [Louhu](#) station. Should you want to make a purchase remember to bargain hard!

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