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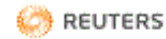
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CHINA: China's art village of Dafen plays host to thousands of artists who churn out replicas of masterpieces by the dozen



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In the legendary Shenzhen "village" of Dafen, urban art copyists routinely knock off Rembrandt, Van Gogh and other masters. Fancy snapping up a Van Gogh or Mona Lisa for a mere 30 U.S. dollars a piece? Head to the art "village" of Dafen in Shenzhen, Southern China, where thousands of artists churn out replicas of masterpieces by the dozen.

The streets are lined with shops filled to the brim with replicas. These are made by thousands of young Chinese artists, hoping to cash in on China's art boom.

The intrepid artists can also rustle up a copy of a popular painting or an individual art piece of any description.

"Oil painting is a very big business in China. Around 60 percent of the world's oil paintings are produced in Shenzhen. We have 5000 artists here, they paint everything from classical, impressionist and abstract, and all the subjects", said Zhang Jing Xuan, the CEO of Shenzhen GWJB Art, a firm specialising in art reproductions.

Reproductions of Chinese contemporary big hitters can also be found on sale, testament to the growing popularity of the country's budding art scene.

While fakes abound, prices for original works by well-known Chinese artists are expected to hit new records at auction.

Visitor Tony Puleo says he and his wife hope to find an original art piece.

"We do see some copying, quite a bit of copying of the masters.

But I also see some talent blossoming with their own creativity," said Puleo.

The Dafen artists' ability to produce cheap paintings en masse has also meant they are sold at a fraction of the normal price.

Ma Hai Bin, 33-year old Dafen painter, says it was always his dream to become an artist.

"I loved painting and art when I was very young. So I chose this profession. I have engaged in this profession for over ten years. And I love painting Venice," said Ma.

It seems China's talent for counterfeiting and sourcing cheap labour has created a booming art industry.

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