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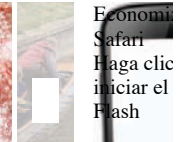
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## The world's biggest art factory: Inside the Chinese village where thousands of artists recreate iconic paintings for sale overseas

- Dafen Oil Painting Village is a suburb of Shenzhen in China's Guangdong province
- Here artists produce up to 60 per cent of the total global volume of reproduction artworks

By [DAMIEN GAYLE](#)

PUBLISHED: 18:08 GMT, 23 July 2013 | UPDATED: 04:02 GMT, 24 July 2013

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China is well known for its mass-production economy.

But these factories are about as far from Foxconn's iPad plants as the imagination can wander.

In Dafen, a suburb of the coastal city of Shenzhen in China's south-eastern Guangdong province, thousands of artists labour constantly to reproduce famous paintings for the mass market.

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**Knock-off masterpieces:** A painter works on a copy of a portrait in a studio at Dafen Oil Painting Village in Shenzhen, south China's Guangdong province



**Mass production:** A logistics company worker carries oil paintings for packaging and probable sale overseas





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A vendor waits for customers in a gallery: The Dafen district is believed to be the largest mass producer of oil paintings in the world



© Reuters

A painter works on an oil painting next to a portrait of China's late Chairman Mao Zedong in his studio selling the portraits of U.S. President Barack Obama (bottom L), China's President Hu Jintao (top C) and late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (top R)





© Reuters

Painter Zhao Xiaoyong works on a copy of a self-portrait by Van Gogh in his gallery: Artists here manufacture some 60 per cent of the total global volume in such knock-off canvases, according to the China Daily



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A woman decorates heavy, gilded frames outside a gallery: Thousands of artists work in Dafen, producing paintings which sell online for an average of £40 each



© Reuters

A painter, who has lost a right arm, works in her studio: Many of the artists are trained in the required techniques at Chinese art academies. But faced with the difficulty of making a living from their own compositions, they produce dozens of replicas of iconic paintings daily to make ends meet

Known as Dafen Oil Painting Village, the district is believed to be the largest mass producer of oil paintings in the world. Artists here manufacture some 60 per cent of the total global volume in such knock-off canvases, according to the China Daily. Many of the artists are trained in the required techniques at Chinese art academies.



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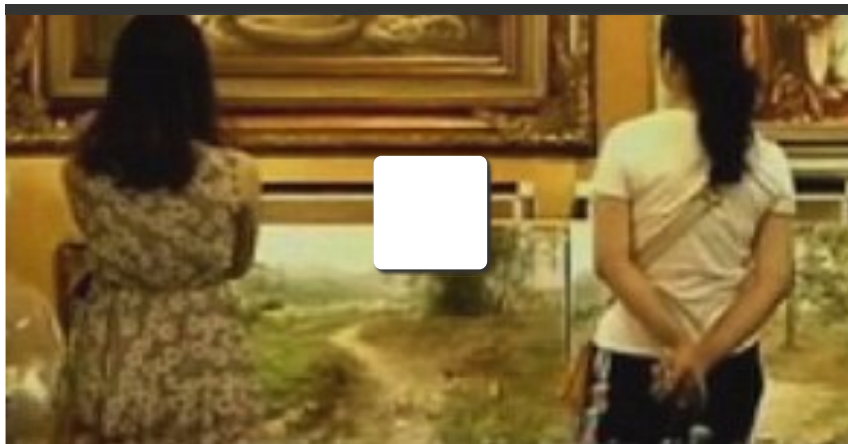


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But faced with the difficulty of making a living from their own compositions, they produce dozens of replicas of iconic paintings daily to make ends meet.

Prices on DafenVillageOnline.com, a website set up to sell works directly to consumers overseas, average about \$60 (£40), but many are no doubt passed on wholesale for far less to be sold in many countries for similar prices.

### Inside China's Dafen village, the world's biggest art factory



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**Start them young: A two-year-old boy, the son of a vendor, sits watching cartoons on an old computer surrounded by dozens of rolled up and hanging canvases at a gallery at Dafen**



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A painter prepares to work on decorative paintings: The economic crisis has hit the purchasing power of many of the district's Western customers



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Zhang Wanping works on a Chinese painting on the roof of a studio: Now many of the districts artists have had to adapt their work to cater to newly affluent Chinese customers





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Painters paint picture frames black on the roof of a studio: The simple black frames pictured here are the kinds which are preferred by art buyers in the East



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Black light: One of the workers enjoys a cigarette as he and his colleague take a rest





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An oil painting of Buddha is seen through window grills: According to one local paper report, exports from Dafen fell more than half in the first six months of last year



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Sixteen-year-old painter Wang Jingang works on nine pieces of decorative paintings at the same time: Artists in Dafen are capable of producing dozens of paintings a day for sale in China and overseas - although these appear to be for the domestic market





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No-one becomes an artist to get rich... A painter squats on the floor to eat noodles for lunch in the kitchen of a rental house, which also contains his art studio



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Candid: A woman takes a moment from painting a scene of the Great Wall to playfully dab a man's nose with her brush





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**Starving artist: A painter eats his lunch in a studio**

Things are changing in Dafen, however, as the continuing economic troubles in the West hit the purchasing power of their traditional customers.

While in the past artists produced endless copies of iconic Western paintings by the likes of Van Gogh, Monet and Picasso, these days they have had to adapt to cater to customers closer to home.

A local newspaper report seen by the BBC claimed that exports fell by more than half in the first half of last year alone after a collapse in Western orders.

One artist, Weng Yugo, 27, told the broadcaster that nearly all his Western customers had lately been replaced by Chinese, and he had been forced to adapt his work.

'There is a difference in taste,' he said. 'I'd say that Westerners prefer classical pictures which tend to be very dark. Chinese people like bright colours.'



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**Living life in colour: Pigment tins are placed on the roof of a studio, on a wall where Chinese symbols have been elegantly scrawled by artists**





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All this painting is tiring work: A two-year-old boy, the son of a vendor, sleeps next to - and on top of - oil paintings at a gallery



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Versatile: Painters work on two very different pictures, one portrait of a Japanese geisha and the other a landscape showing the undulating Great Wall of China





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Painters gather decorative pieces after a day's work: One artist working in Dafen says that Chinese customers prefer brighter colours than buyers in the West



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Painting brushes are placed for sale at a shop in Dafen: With as many as 5,000 artists working in the suburb every day, there is a large-scale art supplies economy to support them





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A vendor sleeps while waiting for customers outside his gallery: Dafen is a suburb of Shenzhen, in China's Guangdong province which boasts a nearly tropical climate



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Bare: An artist relaxes in his austere accommodation, overlooked by a portrait of a beautiful woman





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Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: A painter concentrates on an interpretation of Marilyn Monroe



Discarded paint tubes fill a cardboard box

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