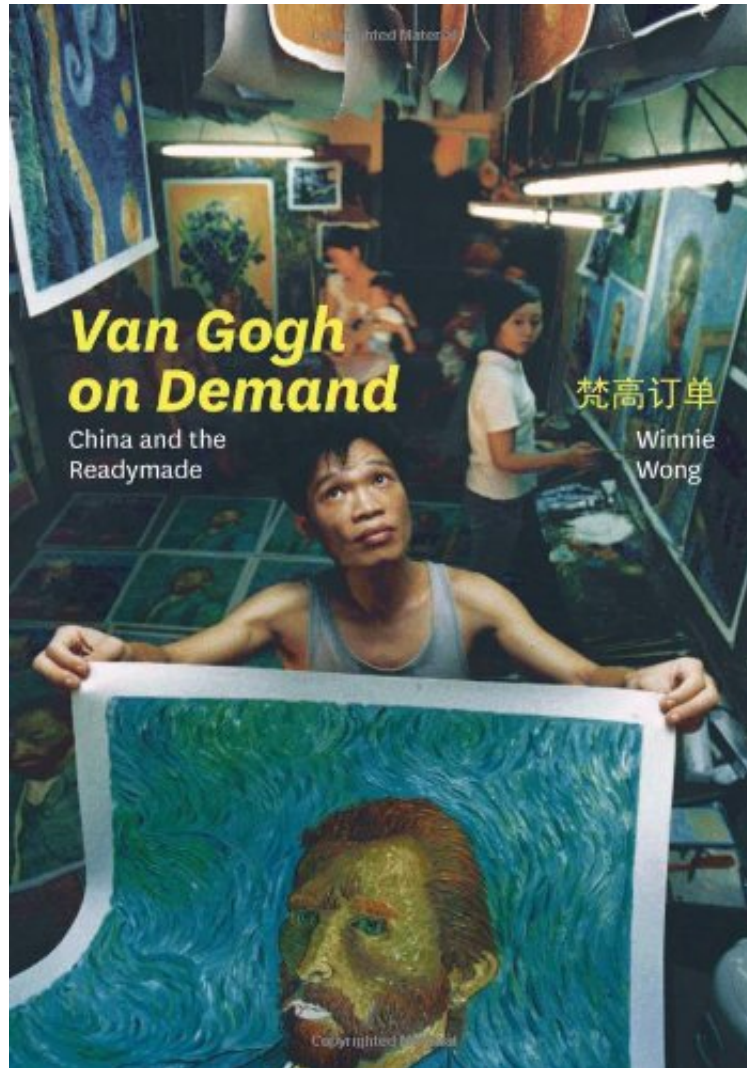


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## Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade

Winnie Wong

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#987261 in Books 2014-04-08Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 10.00 x .90 x 7.001, 1.60 #File Name: 022602489X320 pages | File size: 60.Mb

**Winnie Wong : Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade:

17 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Humor, philosophy, anecdotes - and the difficulty of scholarly proseBy CustomerBackground: for last Christmas, I bought my 4-year-old grandson a "hand-painted van Gogh," Harvest at La Crau, with Montmajour in the Background. The original is 72 x 92cm; Ben's copy is 8x10 in. His pre-school teacher had presented several weeks on painting (you have to assume there were no details on a biography unsuited to pre-school), and Ben for whatever reason responded fervently to van Gogh. I wanted him to see the dimension of paint on canvas and I received two gifts from him -- he immediately ran his fingers over the impasto

surface, again and again; then he asked that the picture be hung, right then, in his bedroom. Ben's copy came from China, probably from Dafen Village, which is the setting of Ms. Wong's treatise. That's the setting: the \*subject\* would have to be summarized as "Challenge everything you ever assumed about art, the artist, creativity, originality, Chinese social structure and politics, and WalMart." When I ordered the book, five months before it got far enough into production to reach my door, I wanted a popular explication of how (possibly) thousands of painters produce many tens of thousands per year of van Goghs, Utrillos, da Vincis, Bougereaus... well, virtually any famous artist you want to name. What I got instead is a mix: insightful anecdotes from conversations with painters and bosses; compelling discussions of painting factory methods and organization (many exploitative, some humanistic, avuncular); massive tugs at assumptions around originality; and, frankly, boring excursions into angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin types of things. Anecdotes? While watching one, er, artist (re-)producing one of van Gogh's sunflower paintings, the artist stood back toward the end, then said, "Time to sign it." Ms. Wong pointed out that van Gogh had not signed the original. The artist: "Oh. You own one?" Sort-of an anecdote: Ms. Wong quotes from the marketing copy of a van Gogh reproduction sold by Amserdam's van Gogh Museum: "It seemed a dream, but this replica makes it possible: a painting [in reality an inkjet - gleece - print] by Vincent van Gogh on the living room wall, and almost indistinguishable from the real thing... This amazing reproduction is delivered rolled-up, affordable and safe, just as van Gogh sent his own canvases to Paris." Anecdote: A Dafen van Gogh artist who, chafing under the low wages, exclaimed that he was not making much more than van Gogh did. Anecdote: Always open about her objective to study Dafen for scholarly purpose, Ms. Wong was interviewing one artist, who pointed out that he was also an "excellent and prolific writer." "...since he had been in Dafen far longer than I, it would be much easier for him to write my dissertation for me.... In the hands of Dafen painters and bosses [and writers], it [ghost-painting, ghost-writing] is a habitual and ubiquitous phenomenon, and recalls a condition in which painting and writing do not constitute any sort of special labor...." One commentator on the Dafen scene wrote, "I realized that most of Dafen painters remained kind of detached and regarded painting more as a labor job." Of course, for hundreds, maybe even thousands of European artists prior to the Romantic age, painting \*was\* a "labor job," and not a sort of special labor. Throughout you'll all sorts of tweaks, all sorts of unanswered and possibly unanswerable questions. For the most part, this book is a sort of high-level page-turner. All this said, however, there are times that I wish a competent copy editor had made some suggestions -- and that Ms. Wong had complied. Take that last sentence in my final anecdote above: could it not be expressed less syllabically: "In the hands of Dafen painters and bosses [and writers], it [ghost-painting, ghost-writing] is ubiquitous. For them, there is no special labor in painting and writing." Scholarly language aside, what happens when -- the very thing we conceptualize as golden fruit of glorious individual vision -- Art becomes a mass-produced object on an assembly line? Is it automatically schlock? Ben's little van Gogh is all master strokes done by a master hand with crystal-clear colors. It is, as Ben immediately saw, equally beautiful to both the eye and the hand. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By GCPretty interesting book.

In a manufacturing metropolis in south China lies Dafen, an urban village that famously houses thousands of workers who paint van Goghs, Da Vincis, Warhols, and other Western masterpieces for the world market, producing an astonishing five million paintings a year. To write about work and life in Dafen, Winnie Wong infiltrated this world, first investigating the work of conceptual artists who made projects there; then working as a dealer; apprenticing as a painter; surveying wholesalers and retailers in Europe, East Asia and North America; establishing relationships with local leaders; and organizing a conceptual art exhibition for the Shanghai World Expo. The result is *Van Gogh on Demand*, a fascinating book about a little-known aspect of the global art worldone that sheds surprising light on the workings of art, artists, and individual genius.

Based on a thoughtful reading of modern and contemporary art theory, lengthy fieldwork, and practical artistic and curatorial engagement with the world of Dafen artists, *Van Gogh on Demand* addresses some of the most demanding and not easily resolved issues of culture and production. Wong skillfully untangles the complicated skein of interconnections between the realms of traditional practice, contemporary Chinese art, mass-scale production, copying, and art circulation in the global marketplace. Compelling, fluent, and highly quotable, this book is a major contribution to the study of China, modernism, postmodernism, and globalization.