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Art+Village+City in the Pearl River Delta | Spring 2015 Studio course

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ART + VILLAGE + CITY IN THE PEARL RIVER DELTA

GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES INTERDISCIPLINARY GRADUATE RESEARCH STUDIO CASE STUDY



WHY READ THIS CASE STUDY?

How can methods of analysis and representation from art history, architecture, anthropology, and urban planning be applied and integrated in the study of the built environment and of the artistic and political culture of a place? How can graduate students from different disciplines collaborate fruitfully? When students create public-facing exhibitions about their research, how does this contribute to their learning? How can short-term field research in an overseas setting produce meaningful knowledge?

This graduate research studio course, *Art+Village+City*, explored these questions in an examination of South China's Pearl River Delta. This region, known for the megacities of Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, also includes many semi-autonomous villages, once rural, now highly urbanized. The villages have fought to maintain a degree of self-governance despite being swallowed up by a larger urban fabric, and in some cases have been fertile ground for the production and reproduction of art, often for sale in the global market.

The studio course was led by Professor of Architecture Margaret Crawford and Professor of Rhetoric and History of Art Winnie Wong. The studio included students from disciplines including anthropology, South and Southeast Asian studies, art history, art practice, architecture, city planning and landscape architecture. Students brought a wide range of expertise and theoretical perspectives, creating an ideal environment for learning across disciplines.

A complete, image-rich account of the course including its conceptual basis, field study trip to China, and the resulting exhibitions can be found in the class publication [Art+Village+City](#).

Keywords:

Pearl River Delta, China, art village history, culture, politics, economics, urban design, ethnography, design, visualization, fabrication, interpretive methods.

This case study is part of an archive of the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative and its Future Histories Lab, supported by the Mellon Foundation. The entire archive, including course case studies, faculty and student reflections, digital projects, symposia, exhibitions, and publications, is available at https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb_guh_fhl.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

ART+VILLAGE+CITY IN THE PEARL RIVER DELTA



GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITIES INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH STUDIO

Architecture 209 / Rhetoric 250

Spring 2014, 4 Units

Instructors:

Margaret Crawford (Architecture)

Winnie Wong (Rhetoric)

Before its current incarnation as the “factory to the world” and one of the densest multi-city clusters in the world, the Pearl River Delta region (PRD) was covered with agricultural villages. These villages are today surrounded by urban development as “villages-in-the-city,” and are home to migrants from all over China. Due to their unique legal status acquired over the course of 20th century history, urban villagers are today among the few Chinese citizens who can control their own land, build their own houses and elect their own leaders. Since 2006, central and municipal government policies have sought to diminish village power, working to eliminate the village as an independent entity in the city. Art, design, and the creative economy has been central to this dynamic between the village and the city, and the “art village” has emerged as a transformative and distinctive urban phenomenon.

This research studio critically investigated a wide range of urban art villages in the Pearl River Delta, exploring their historical development, current state, and future potential. These sites range from Dafen Oil Painting Village in Shenzhen, which exports hundreds of thousands of trade paintings around the world, to Xiaozhou Village in Guangzhou, where local artists and art teachers transformed village houses into studios and galleries, to the collaborative architectural project of Japanese architect Fujimoto and the avant-garde Vitamin Creative Space in Guangzhou. Throughout the region, villagers, artists, officials, migrants, developers, and entrepreneurs have leveraged art practices in order to reimagine urban life and urban citizenship. This studio documented and investigated their efforts, and proposed its own interventions.

The studio entailed a 14-day intensive fieldwork trip in the Pearl River Delta during the Spring Semester break, kicking off with an examination of Hong Kong's alternative art spaces, moving on to investigate Shenzhen's model art villages, then focusing on new iterations in Guangzhou and its expansive environs, and ending at an experimental cultural preservation site in Kaiping.

Throughout the studio, students explored multidisciplinary methods in urban research, documentary and ethnographic fieldwork, and developing tools for visualization, analysis, and presentation. Students were expected to use studio time to work in collaborative teams to produce both visual and textual projects, and the studio discussion took the format of weekly pinups and two studio crits. The research studio culminated in a public project exhibition and symposium held at UC Berkeley and an exhibition at the Shanghai West Bund Biennale.

The documentation of the studio's exhibition can be accessed below.

THE INSTRUCTORS



Margaret Crawford

Margaret Crawford is Professor of Architecture at UC Berkeley. An architectural and urban historian, she has conducted research and taught studios in the Pearl River Delta since 2006, collaborating with South China University of Technology in Guangzhou. She is the author of two recent articles on urban villages and urban agriculture in the PRD and recently received a Fulbright Fellowship to prepare a book on Panyu, a district of Guangzhou. She is the author of *Building the Workingman's Paradise, Everyday Urbanism*, and numerous articles on the American built environment.



Winnie Wong

Winnie Wong is Associate Professor of Rhetoric at UC Berkeley. She has conducted research in the Pearl River Delta since 1999, with a particular focus on contemporary art, popular culture, and urban history. Her recently published book, *Van Gogh on Demand* (U Chicago Press 2014), examines intersections of contemporary art and painting at Dafen village, and is based on in-depth fieldwork with migrant painters and conceptual artists. She is currently at work on an edited volume on the history of Shenzhen, as well as a history of trade painting in 18th- and 19th-century Guangzhou.



Graduate students and faculty made an intensive 14-day study trip to the Pearl River Delta in southern China. Students and faculty came from many disciplines including anthropology, urban planning, art history and studio art, and employed mixed methods including field observations, interviews, photography, sketching, and mapping to investigate a number of “art villages” where art production was central to community identity and economy.



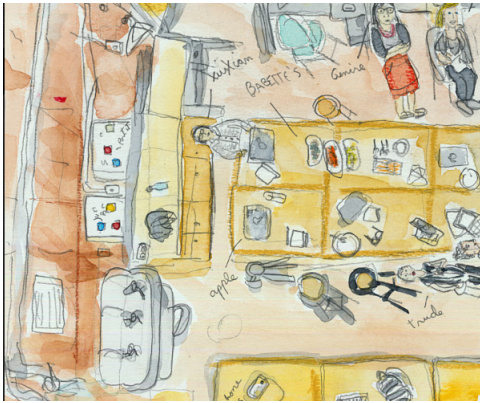
Students and faculty in the class occupied a dedicated studio room for the entire semester. This workshop-like space was a communal social, creative, and intellectual space in which photographs, maps, sketches, and material gathered before and during the study trip were pinned to the walls for inspiration and analysis. Collage and bricolage were methods for investigating the complex physical and cultural landscape of the Pearl River Delta. The room itself became a palimpsest of accumulated knowledge and a staging ground for developing an exhibition and catalog about the research. It was also a space to invite critics for an iterative process of interim reviews.

SEMESTER MAP

ARC OF THE SEMESTER

Professors Wong and Crawford conceived of Art + Village + City as an open-ended inquiry into the human condition in the built environment through the interdisciplinary tools of urban studies and the collaborative ethos of design practice. Twelve graduate students in MLA, MS, PhD, MFA and MCP programs represented the disciplines of Landscape Architecture, Architecture, Architectural History and Theory, Anthropology, South East Asian Studies, Art Practice, Urban Planning and Art History. Students and professors were from the US, Venezuela, Chile, China, Italy and Canada. Bringing frameworks, methods and questions from these fields, they worked together in their studio, Wurster 491, filling the space with research materials and hosting scholars from inside and outside the university. José Figueroa, an MFA student, regularly documented the class meetings and trip in lively watercolor drawings.

WEEK 1- INTRODUCTION & WELCOME TO THE PEARL RIVER DELTA



The first week of the Art + Village + City studio, we set up our desks and gave detailed introductions of ourselves to each other. The instructors shared research trajectories and manifestos, followed with discussion and questions. Our second session of the first week was going through the history and geography of region from 1920s to present.

WEEK 2- ART/DESIGNS WORLDS, URBAN VILLAGES, & INTERVIEWS

In Week 2, we discussed the Chinese contemporary art world and forms of architectural practice in contemporary China. We were also joined by Liu Hong, an artist and professor at Mills College- who talked about “How does one become an artist in China or America?- a personal history.” The second half of the week, we discussed the urban villages in Shenzhen, China and interviewing methods for capturing oral history.



WEEK 3- CRITS OF INTERVIEWS & DAFEN, SHENZHEN, AND MIGRANT WORKERS

We started off the week with student presentations of interviews they conducted with a San Francisco-based Chinese organization, followed by watching artist interviews on the Asia Art Archive’s database. The week ended with a screening of the movie *The Last Train Home* and a discussion on the film.



WEEK 4 & WEEK 5- CRITS OF VIDEO PROJECTS & DISCUSSION OF THE GREATER GUANGZHOU AREA

Students gave presentations on their second project, a site video of a local Chinese site, the Pacific East Mall in Oakland's Chinatown. We then discussed the history of greater Guangzhou and its redevelopment, history of art in Guangzhou, and had a guest, Lan-Chih Po, from international studies, who discussed greater Guangzhou to Dongguan.



WEEK 6 & WEEK 7- ETHNOGRAPHY

We were joined by guest speaker Teresa Caldeira, who discussed "What is ethnography?" To dive further into film ethnography, we watched Libbie Cohn and JP Sniadecki's film *People's Park*, created in 2012 through the Sensory Ethnography Lab.



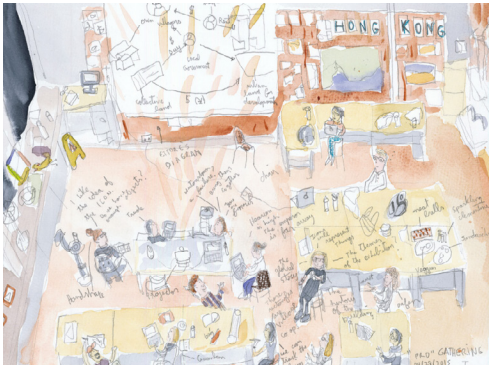
WEEK 8- PHOTOGRAPHY & NEW MOVEMENTS

Students presented their third assignment, photography they captured of people and places. We were joined by guest Michael Mascuch, who offered critiques. Later in the week, we were joined by guests, Mary Ann O'Donnell, who discussed Baishizhou art/urban village project and Lyn Jeffrey, who discussed the Shenzhen Maker Movement.



WEEK 9- VILLAGE GENTRIFICATION / CREATIVE INDUSTRY & CASE STUDIES

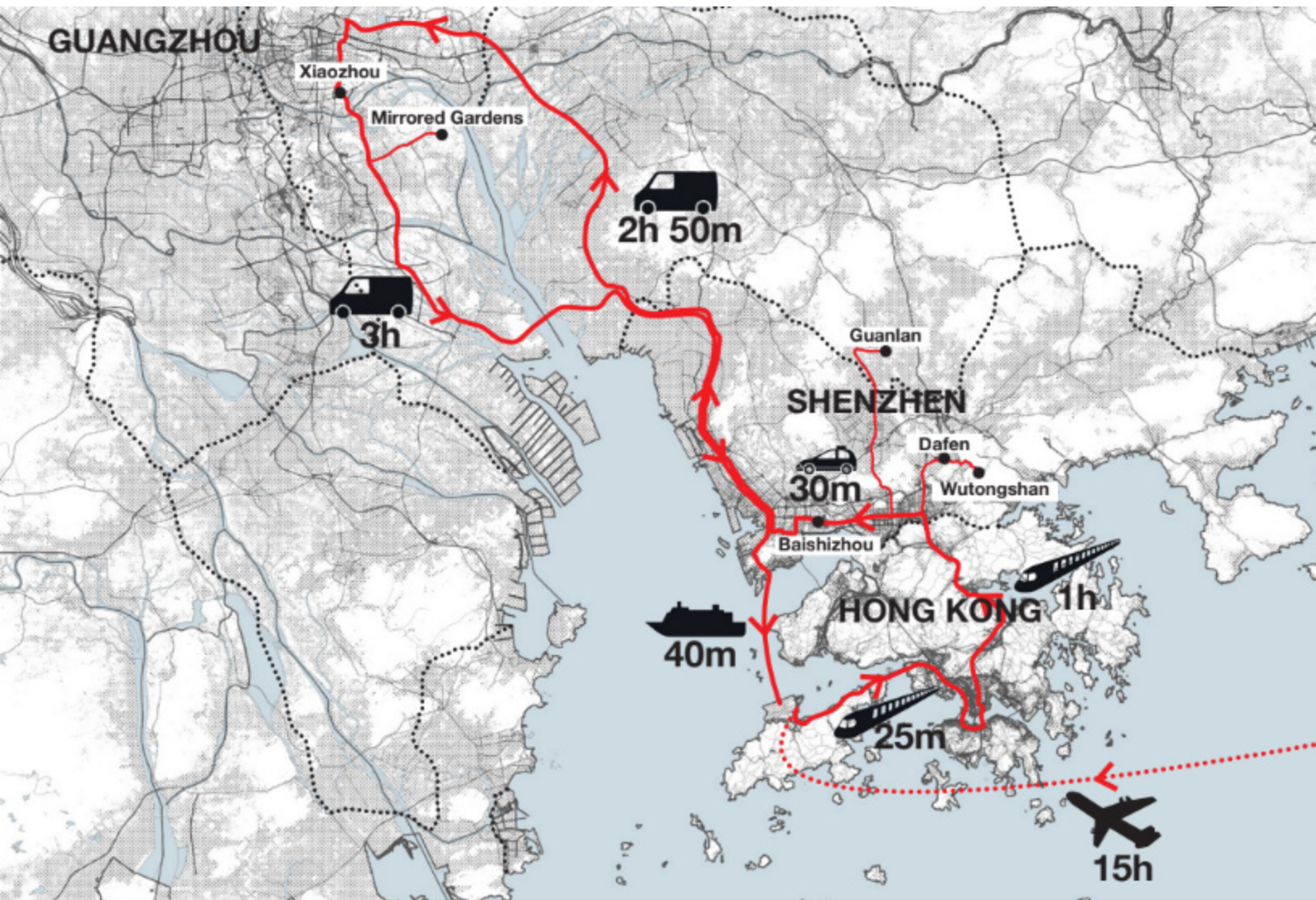
This week we discussed readings assigned on Art Villages in China, and were joined by Pheng Cheah who spoke about the creative industry in Hong Kong. We then discussed potential case studies of Zheng Guogu, Vitamin Creative Space, Ou Ning, etc.



WEEK 10- DOCUMENTATION & PREPARTION FOR THE STUDIO TRIP

Students presented what they had collected and documented in the studio. This consisted of building a database from various sources from scholarship, newspapers, blogs, social media, etc. Preparations were also made for our studio trip.





In the study trip, students explored the notion of *desakota*, a term in urban geography used to describe the intermingling of urban and rural land use around large cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Travel among a variety of sites allowed students to compare art production villages that emerged through bottom-up economic forces and/or through top-down government interventions. Extensive preparation before the trip helped students make the most of an intense travel schedule.

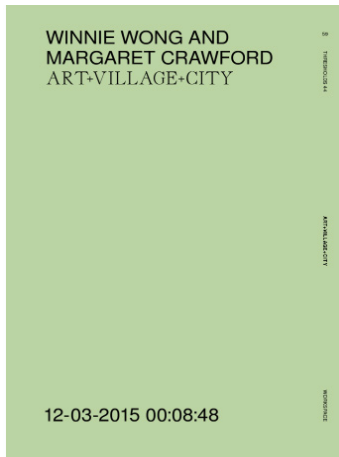
Performance Ethnography



José Figueroa set up his watercolors in front of Dafen Village's colorful kindergarten, located in the village's central square. Scholars consider Shenzhen and Dafen village to be very progressive in improving the welfare of rural-to urban-migrant workers and their families. In Dafen village, a few painters who have demonstrated long term residence and professional skills are permitted to send their children (with rural hukou) to the local kindergarten and elementary schools. However, migrant worker families still face the problem of high school fees, and many of their children are not eligible to attend Shenzhen's high schools. Since most painters in Dafen village paint from photographic sources, the ability to paint from life is often considered to be a practice of "originality." While painting this image of the kindergarten, José attracted the attention of many children from the school, as well as tourists, visitors, and other painters, who commented on his ability to represent the kindergarten building.

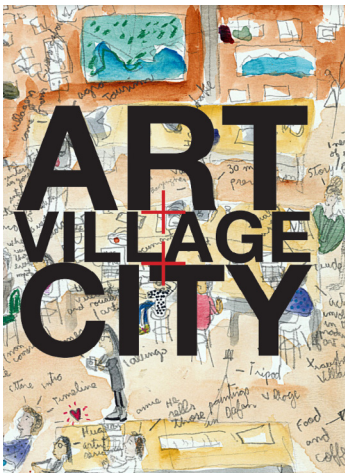


PUBLICATIONS



PUBLICATION

“Art+Village+City” was published in volume 44 of *Thresholds* (2016).



EXHIBITION

“Art + Village + City in the Pearl River Delta” is a 95-page exhibition catalog produced by the Global Urban Humanities Research Studio, University of California, Berkeley. The catalog describes the conceptual basis of the course, the process of research, and the exhibitions and other work products made by students. A PDF version can be accessed via the button below. To order a print copy, visit <http://www.lulu.com>.

EXHIBITIONS

Wurster Gallery, University of California, Berkeley

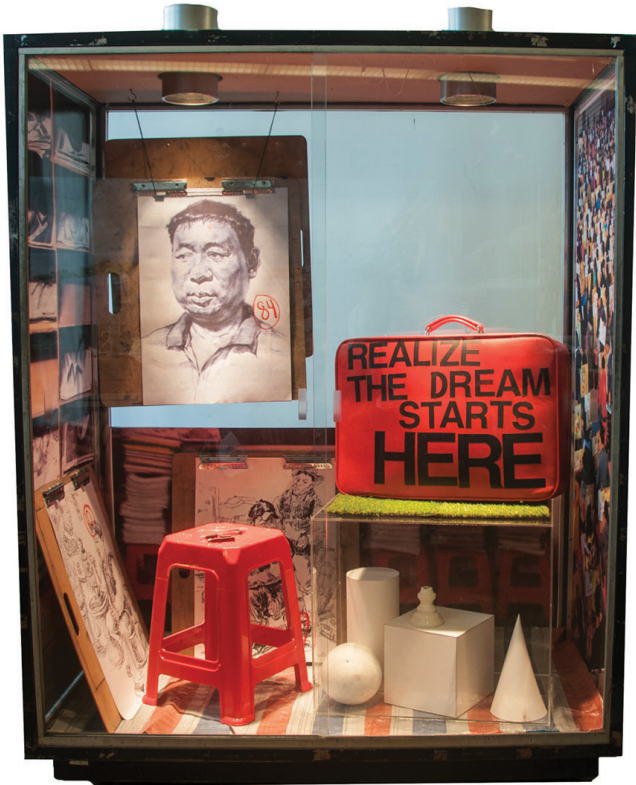
October 9 - November 14, 2015



Dafen Diorama

As part of an immersive exhibition in Bauer Wurster Gallery at the UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design, students created dioramas representing the experience of visiting art villages.

One of the places represented was Dafen Village, where hand-painted replicas of works by artists including Van Gogh and Rembrandt are produced in large numbers for both export markets.



Xiaozhou Art Camps diorama
75" x 60" x 31"

49



Dafen diorama
75" x 60" x 31"



Made in Xiaozhou diorama
75" x 60" x 31"

Dafen Village Model

In another part of the exhibition at Bauer Wurster Gallery, students created models of the village and displayed examples of the replica paintings. Dafen Oil Painting Village is the world's largest production center for oil-on-canvas painting. In 2006, at its height, it housed an estimated 8000 painters, who produced five million paintings per year. Dafen is a village-in-the-city of Shenzhen, a city that has attracted uncountable numbers of rural migrant workers seeking a way to make a livelihood. Because all of their paintings are sourced from photographs or the internet, Western observers deride Dafen as a factory of “forgers.” In fact, these painters’ practices are not so different from those of any professional painter in the history of art, except that they produce a much higher volume of work. Dafen means many different things in Shenzhen. It is a prominent art village, a major tourist attraction, and even a set location for some movies. In 2004, the Central government named Dafen a model cultural industry. Since then officials have initiated policies to assist painters and their families with urban rights, intellectual property law education, and the fostering of creativity through the support of “original” art. Architects have decided that Dafen is an urban village that deserves preservation rather than demolition. For many Chinese people, it is a place where anyone can realize his or her dream of becoming an artist.



Shanghai Exhibition, West Bund Biennale

October 2015

The studio presented its work at a second exhibition in Shanghai, China sponsored by the Global Urban Humanities Initiative.



ARCHITECTURE 209 / RHETORIC 250
ART + VILLAGE + CITY