

## The copy of a copy of a copy

The Hong Qiao Pearl Market is on the outskirts of Shanghai and offers practically anything in the way of pearls. Here you can choose between any quality and price range. Practically any conceivable mass-produced products from China are sold here, along with a wide stock of bootleg Western branded goods.

Imports from China have not consisted exclusively of physical products. In the 18th century, “Chinoiserie”, imitations of Chinese art and styles, became popular. Kina Slott at Drottningholm Palace is a typical example of how royalty engaged in importing cultural ideas in this way.

In his practice, Karl Patric Näsman often uses travels. He has followed works of art across national borders, how they have changed hands, been bought and sold, how art is forged or stolen, and how the provenance and records of the rightful owner have been altered. Näsman has also travelled in the footsteps of artworks, and asked professional Chinese copy artists to replicate works according to his instructions.

In China copying is an occupation that has been refined to the extent that you can get a practically immaculate copy of any original.

Chinese factories produce exact copies of Eames furniture and other design classics that are shown alongside the originals at design fairs.

There are cities in China that are partly copies of European cities. Chinese residential areas have been modelled on Paris, the English countryside, and even Sigtuna. You could say that the flow has been reversed since the 18th century. China is now importing styles and expressions from the West.

When Karl Patric Näsman goes to China to produce copies of Swedish splash painting, he chooses to collaborate with a contemporary Chinese artist, Jiang Weitao. Based on Näsman’s instructions, he and Jiang Weitao together produced several metres of splash-painted linen canvas, which Näsman then brought back to Sweden to mount on stretchers and present as paintings. In the work *Shanghai Pearl Market*, the canvas is stretched on a specially-made room divider. Here, the painting is transferred from its “natural” place as a painting on a wall, to a piece of furniture with a specific purpose. The painting has been turned into a utility object, but Näsman chooses to let it remain in the art context, and it becomes a form of free-standing sculptural object in the room. Together with this folding screen, Näsman shows another manifestation of the same splash technique, this time as mounted, wall-hung paintings. The same painting presents itself in two entirely different ways.

Splash painting is now a kit that can be used in a variety of ways – as object, painting, design.

A deconstruction takes place here, not only of the idea of painting as

something authentic or exalted, but also of the place for painting. Näsman makes no distinction between using his paintings as subject matter or material.

Karl Patric Näsman allows the work process to be clearly present in his paintings. Techniques that belong more in decoration painting or various forms of stage design, are highlighted as bearers of meaning. Graining, faux marbling and splash painting are usually associated with imitations. Valuable materials are presented in a new form, where they are unauthentic but nevertheless call for great skill. A well-executed graining or faux marbling requires a high degree of craftsmanship and experience. It is always open with the fact that it is a skilful imitation, not an attempt to trick us into thinking that what we see is real wood or stone rather than the result of clever copying.

In the past, splash painting was popular in Swedish rural society. It has never enjoyed the status of graining or faux marbling, and yet it requires certain skills and the ability to handle tools.

Here, Näsman touches on a contemporary discussion concerning how painting is activated by the context in which it appears. It is not, in other words, that the painting “depicts” something. Nor is it an abstract painting. On the contrary, what activates the painting and gives it contents is the contexts in which it appears and how it is presented in them. The painting is part of a series of events.

In Karl Patric Näsman’s paintings indexicality ceases. There is no trace of the artist’s hand. The painting is the result of two people’s work, without any indication of who did what. The paintings are a result of a series of planned and performed steps. Painting, which is then used to manufacture art.

*Thomas Elovsson*

Lector, Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Designs