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# WINNIE WONG AND MARGARET CRAWFORD ART+VILLAGE+CITY

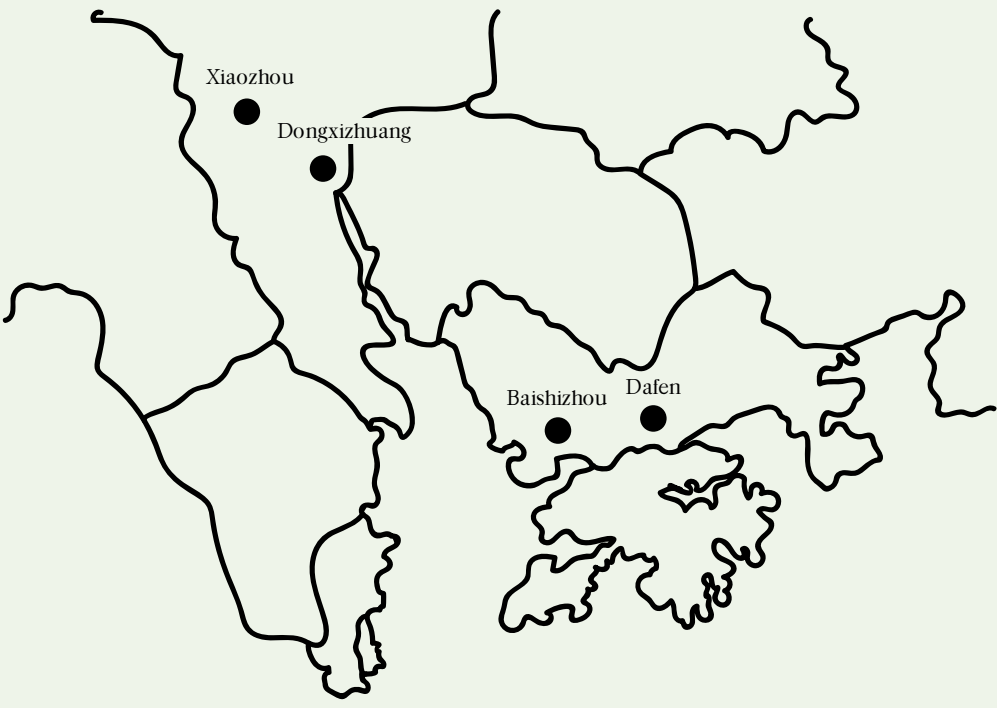
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ART+VILLAGE+CITY

WORKSPACE

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The following materials are the product of a studio, sponsored by the Global Urban Humanities Initiative at UC Berkeley, which 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 ranged 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, and to the collaborative architectural project of Japanese architect Fujimoto and Vitamin Creative Space in Guangzhou. The studio aimed to analyze the ways in which villagers, artists, officials, migrants, developers, entrepreneurs leverage art practices in order to reimagine urban life and urban citizenship. Texts by Winnie Wong and Margaret Crawford, designed by Ettore Santi with artworks by José Figueroa, images and research by Story Wiggins, Xiuxian Zhan, Valentina Rozas-Krause, Sben Korsh; sponsored by the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative.

#### +ART

Art in contemporary China is legitimated by two major sources: the art market and the party-state. The art market in China spans the very high and the very low: from top-dollar international buyers, collectors, and auction houses, to the consumer wholesale market of decorative paintings. Art made for the market is produced in many media, by artists of all social statuses, and often speaks in subject matter to urban audiences and buyers. The cultural arms of the Chinese state and the cultural organizations of the Chinese Communist Party are also major sponsors of art. Together they fund and administer a host of institutions that train, exhibit, and support artists, including Fine Arts Academies, Artists Associations and Painting Institutes. Admission rates to the top Art Academies are only about three percent, hence academy graduates in China form an elite and influential cultural network. Yet this has not stopped many youths, migrant workers, retirees, and many others rejected by the Academy from pursuing the dream of becoming an artist. In 2005, Jiang Zemin inaugurated China's cultural and creative industry policies, spurring, for example, plans to build 1,000 museums in under ten years. The national government

increasingly regarded cultural and soft power as a foreign policy tool and a domestic policy. These culminated in the current leader Xin Jinping's ideology of the "Chinese Dream," a discourse of individual self-realization for the purpose of national ascendance on the global stage.

#### +VILLAGE

In the Pearl River Delta region (PRD), villages have a unique political, cultural, and physical status. The Chinese constitution uniquely gives villagers alone the right to control their own land and build their own houses. In the PRD, rapid urban growth sprang out of these once-rural enclaves or surrounded them. In the process, villagers transformed themselves into landlords and developers, and used their land-use rights to build factories used by foreign investors, and housing rented by rural-to-urban migrant workers from regions of China. The sheer number of urban villages that exist in some form in PRD cities (1600 in Guangzhou, 1000 in Shenzhen) and struggles over land ownership and land-use rights have created issues for municipal governance. But since village chiefs are the only officials in China to be democratically elected, the urban villages of the PRD are also incubators of political reform and the site of many political protests.

In Shenzhen, urban villages are classified as "villages in the city." They are densely packed places surrounded by urban development. In Guangzhou, a significant number of urban villages are classified as "villages by the city." This classification refers to lower density communities set within agricultural fields and orchards, but within range of the city centers. Both

types of villages, which offer low rents and flexible spaces, captured the interest of artists, small entrepreneurs and culture officials.

#### +CITY

In 1978, at the outset of the Reform era, there were no contemporary Chinese artists known to the international world. Today, Chinese artists are featured in every major international art exhibition and several Chinese artists are household names in the art world. The rise of contemporary art is one of the most visible results of China's spectacular economic growth and reform since the end of the Maoist era.

In the PRD, the willingness of local officials and village leaders to experiment with urban culture has created new and unexpected spaces for nurturing many kinds of art production. As a result, in the urban villages of the PRD, migrant workers, urban professionals, art students, recent graduates, retirees, and officials themselves are all able to engage in art making. Together they have generated a huge array of forms of art, reinventing both themselves and the cities they live in. The many "art villages" of the PRD are thus one of the most dynamic cultural phenomena in China today, expanding and impacting the possibilities of both urbanization and social change.

#### SITES

Four urban art villages, in two cities, are included in the following pages.

##### IN SHENZHEN:

- 1) Dafen Oil Painting Village: The World's Largest Production Site for Oil-on-Canvas Painting
- 2) Handshake 302 in Baishizhou Village: Socially-Engaged Practice in an Urban Village

##### IN GUANGZHOU:

- 3) Xiaozhou Artists' Village: A Bohemian Art Village linked to the Art Academy
- 4) Mirrored Gardens and Dongxizhuang Village: Connecting the Global Art World with Rural Life

## SITE 1: DAFEN OIL PAINTING VILLAGE

Dafen Oil Painting Village is the world's largest production center for oil-on-canvas painting. It 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 living. Because the vast majority 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, except that they produce a relatively high volume of work. In 2004, the national 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.



José Figueroa, Dafen Diorama, 75 x 60 x 31 inches. Photo courtesy of artist.

## THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF THE DAFEN PAINTING TRADE

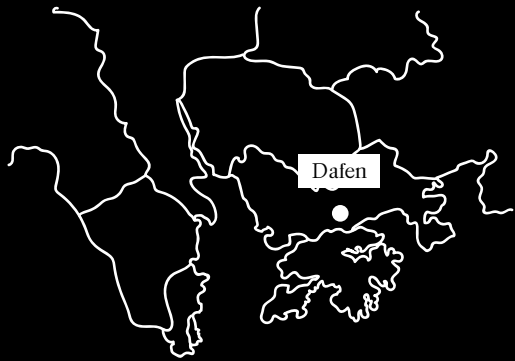
New Village: In 2004, after building numerous 'handshake' buildings on their village plots to be rented to small firms and migrant workers, and as the city continued to appropriate the village's collective land, Dafen villagers laid out a plan to build themselves a New Village. They chose a green spot near a small mountain, and quickly constructed nine six story buildings before the government could stop them. The village developer had initially planned for ten ten-story buildings with underground parking and elevators but other villagers thought it was too expensive. The New Village, completed in 2006, is spacious and airy, with two tennis courts and a swimming pool. Villagers gather in the large community hall and kitchen to celebrate festivals, holidays, weddings and births. Ninety-eight percent of Dafen's 346 villagers live together here.

## GOVERNMENT DEVELOPED HOUSING

In 2008, the district-level government built a large mixed-use development on the edge of Dafen village. For this project, the district-level government served as both planner and developer. They built three residential towers with three floors of commercial space, surrounding a large plaza. They intended the commercial spaces to be used for art galleries and other associated functions but most stand empty today. In 2010, the government provided subsidized housing in one of these towers to twenty painters who had won Dafen's annual copying competition and passed professional exams. Later, all painters who could prove adequate



SITE 1: DAFEN OIL PAINTING VILLAGE:  
The World's Largest Production Site for Oil-on-Canvas Painting





professional qualifications could apply for this subsidized housing.

**Galleries:** In 2004, street-level painting galleries, selling directly to middlemen, clients, and tourists began appearing in Dafen village, after the local government improved the village's basic sewage and roadway infrastructure. Between 2004 and 2006, 600 registered galleries were opened. Galleries enable painters and small bosses to find their own clients. Buyers visit Dafen from all over the world to place orders. The largest numbers are from France, Italy, Russia, Japan, Malaysia, and Israel. Dafen paintings have been seen on sale all over the world, including at Mont Blanc, Hyde Park, Central Park, and Piazza Navona.

**Residential Tower:** Dafen's painting market is closely linked to the global residential property market. From 2000 to 2008, the global property bubble supported more than 80 percent of Dafen's output. Millions of paintings per year were exported to Hong Kong, South Korea, Israel, Germany, Russia, Italy, and Morocco, then often re-exported to the United States to be sold in furniture, frame, and souvenir stores. After the 2008 global financial crisis, Chinese property development continued to grow, so Dafen turned out paintings for the domestic market. In the early 2000s, the gated development that towers over Dafen, typical of middle-class housing in China, was built. Each flat is renovated and furnished by the owners, so they need Dafen paintings to complete the look.

**Art Museum:** In 2002, China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage announced that China would build 1000 museums by 2015. Soon after, an official

at the Shenzhen city government's urban planning commission, Zhou Hong-mei, began advocating for a museum to be built in Dafen. A cutting-edge Shenzhen architecture firm, Urbanus, won the competition to design the museum. The museum was completed in 2007 and then handed over to the local street-office government. Unfortunately they never implemented most of the programming envisioned by the city government and the architects, intended to integrate Dafen's painting trade with its surrounding communities. These officials had ideas of their own about art, culture, and the function of a museum. Dafen painters and bosses nicknamed the museum "the giant toilet" for its high construction and maintenance costs, and its propensity to leak.

#### SITE 2: HANDSHAKE 302 IN BAISHIZHOU VILLAGE: SOCIALLY-ENGAGED PRACTICE IN AN URBAN VILLAGE

**Baishizhou Urban Village in Overseas China Town:** In the Maoist era, this 12.5 km<sup>2</sup> area was known as the Shahe agricultural collective. In the early 1980s, it was divided into two parcels: Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) and Shahe Enterprises. OCT takes its name from one of the agricultural collectives composed of Chinese people from Southeast Asia who repatriated during the Maoist era to support the construction of socialist China. In the Reform era, OCT was incorporated as a state-owned enterprise (SOE) with a management team made up of educated professionals from China's major cities. Shahe, on the other hand, continued to be managed by its former collective leaders,

and therefore retained its village social structure and built environment. In the 1990s, as light manufacturing became less profitable, the SOE developed OCT into a modern district that includes theme parks, golf courses, housing, hotels, shopping malls and an arts district, which retains particular support from the developer, who is an art collector. That arts district today includes some of the most vibrant contemporary art, music, and design venues of the city. Shahe, in contrast, remained less developed. Its five villages are now lumped together as Baishizhou, a dense urban village surrounded by luxury and tourist developments.

**Handshake Buildings:** In Shenzhen's urban villages, "handshake" buildings are the predominant mixed-use house type. Occupying the footprint of a villager's apportioned space, these three to seven stories are built so close together that neighbors can shake hands through their windows. This is the floor plan of a typical apartment further subdivided into two units, usually rented out to a single migrant worker or a couple. It features a toilet, a space for a hotplate, and one half of a window. However, because the next building is very close, the space never gets any daylight. The rent is 1100RMB (roughly \$150) per month.

**Handshake 302:** Handshake 302 is housed in a rented half-apartment inside Baishizhou urban village. It was founded in 2013 by Mary Ann O'Donnell, Zhang Kaiqin, and many other creative Shenzhen inhabitants as part of the "Urban Villages Task Force." Handshake 302 hosts public events, discussion forums, and artist's residencies inside this tiny space. Since Baishizhou residents are primarily migrant

workers who wish to leave as soon as possible, Baishizhou is like a community without a community. Yet, although Handshake 302's community is brought together by art, its founders do not claim to make it. Rather their activities are in keeping with many socially-engaged art practices around the world.

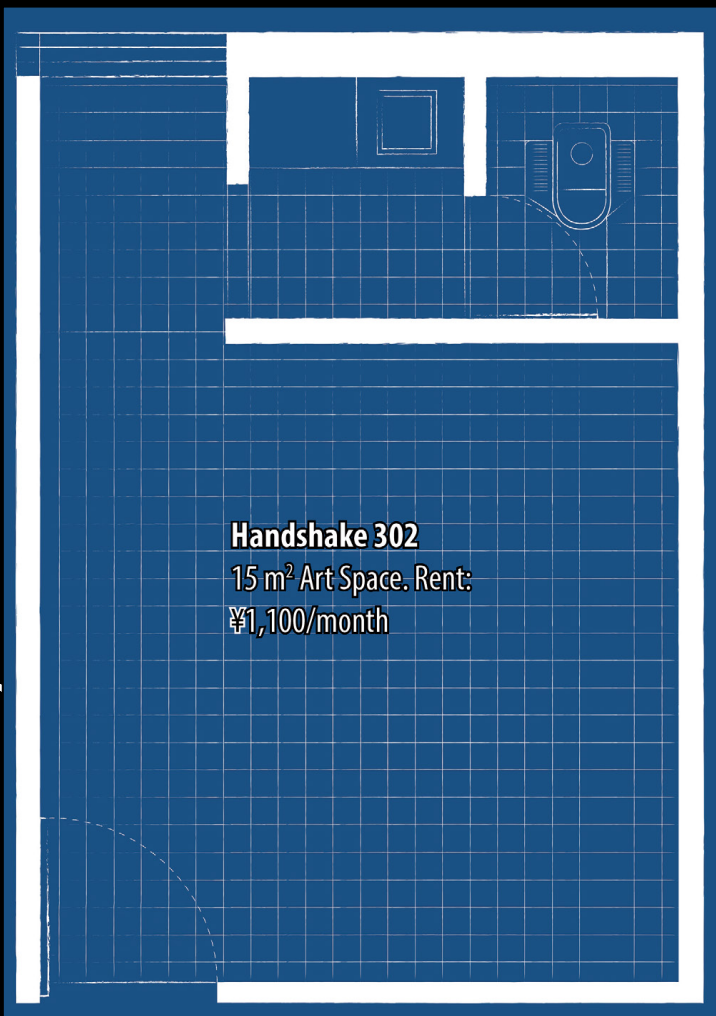
### SITE 3: XIAOZHOU ARTISTS' VILLAGE

Xiaozhou Village is a traditional Lingnan lineage village with the primary surname Jian. Dating back to the Ming dynasty, the village's vast "ten thousand acre orchard" of fruit trees has shaped its destiny. After the Reform and Opening Up period began, the municipal government's insistence on preserving the orchards prevented the village from industrializing, like most nearby settlements. As a result, many villagers remained in their traditional houses, set along narrow lanes and picturesque waterways. Others left the village for jobs or undertook home-based manufacturing, using their wages to upgrade and modernize their houses. This produced a broad spectrum of housing types and living conditions.

The village's charm, greenery and clean air attracted artists. In the late 1980s, the municipality asked the Village Committee to give building sites to high-level government-supported artists to construct their own houses. Later, artists expelled from the villages on the new University Island moved here, followed by graduates of the Guangzhou Fine Art Academy and visiting foreign artists. Students came for affordable housing, urban white collar workers came for alternative life styles, and shopkeepers



SITE 2: HANDSHAKE 302 IN BAISHIZHOU VILLAGE:  
Socially-Engaged Practice in an Urban Village



**Handshake 302**  
15 m<sup>2</sup> Art Space. Rent:  
¥1,100/month





SITE 3: XIAOZHOU ARTISTS' VILLAGE:  
A Bohemian Art Village linked to the Art Academy





José Figueroa, Xiaozhou Art Camps Diorama, 75 x 60 x 31 inches.  
Photo courtesy of artist.



José Figueroa, Made in Xiaozhou Diorama, 75 x 60 x 31 inches.  
Photo courtesy of artist.

came for new business opportunities. Unlike most urban villages, in Xiaozhou migrants and villagers interact. Their social and economic networks give the village a cosmopolitan quality.

On weekends the village is crowded with visitors, mostly young people from the city who stroll its picturesque lanes, stopping for cappuccinos or shopping for handmade goods. Families visit the galleries or pick fruit, then eat in the numerous restaurants that have sprung up under the freeway or by the orchard.

The village continually transforms itself. In 2002, Xiaozhou lost its village status and became urbanized as a neighborhood of Guangzhou's Haizhu district. Villagers received urban *hukou*. Starting in 2011, the village gradually sold its orchards to the city government which built an Eco-Park, designed by the famed Beijing landscape architect Kong- jian Yu. The profits financed an ongoing building boom, adding density to the village core. As rents have gone up, students and artists have started to move to other villages nearby, like Huangpu, Shenjin, and Nanting.

Beginning in the 1980s, supported by the village leaders and district government, Xiaozhou attracted many different types of artists, who occupy multiple sites. Estimates of their numbers go as high as 1,000, including craftspeople and gallery owners. Galleries and studios can be found all over the village, in the Art Zone under the freeway, in former industrial spaces in the orchards, and have expanded to nearby apartment towers and to Nanting village, two kilometers away on University Island. In turn, art activities have generated new bohemian forms of commerce such as inns, cafes, crafts shops and boutiques.

Much of the village's art-making activities are invisible, taking place in studios that are off limits to visitors. Others become visible only on weekends or during special occasions such as the Action Art Festival. Held in the You You Contemporary Art Center, a repurposed Mao-era meeting hall, it attracts performance artists from around the world. The Xiaozhou Art Festival, sponsored by the District government, showcases local artists and galleries. Like the village, Xiaozhou's art scene is always changing. The Hua Yuan (Provincial Painting Institute) community, where artists settled in the 1990s, has become a high-end gated precinct, with few resident artists. Other artists, deploring the recent construction boom and proliferation of art camps, are moving away. But many new graduates from the Guangzhou Art Academy still find Xiaozhou, with its reputation as an established art platform, an attractive place to live and work.

## XIAOZHOU ART CAMPS

In order to enroll in one of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts's twenty-eight majors, a Chinese high school student must take a General Art Exam (*liankao*). Designed to test their foundational art skills, the exam consists of three parts: a three-hour portrait drawn from a photograph, a thirty minute composition drawn from memory, and a three-hour still-life painting. A jury scores each drawing or painting out of a possible 100 marks. Only students with the highest scores are admitted. In 2015, 42,000 students took the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts' entrance exam but only 1,335 students were accepted, an admission rate of three percent.

Starting in 2004, private "art camps" began appearing in Xiaozhou village, designed to give high school students extra training and preparatory practice for the art examinations. An estimated fifty



Students taking a practice exam for the General Art Exam in Xiaozhou Village.  
Photo: Xiao Yaoteng 萧耀腾. Reproduced with permission of the artist.





SITE 4: MIRRORED GARDENS AND DONGXIZHUANG  
VILLAGE: Connecting the Global Art World with Rural Life



to sixty art camps of various sizes exist in Xiaozhou, with the largest taking nearly 1,000 students. The art camps run in the summer through fall and a short section in spring, and cost between 2,000-5,000 RMB per month, including room and board. High school students, many from rural communities with little opportunity to study art, come from all over Guangdong province to train in Xiaozhou.

#### SITE 4: MIRRORED GARDENS AND DONGXIZHUANG VILLAGE

Mirrored Gardens, designed by Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, is a white cube art gallery in buildings inspired by nearby village forms. The galleries, along with a kitchen, library and offices, are part of Mirrored Gardens. Founded in 2002 by curator Zhang Wei and writer Hu Fang, Vitamin Creative Space has multiple art spaces and functions as both a commercial gallery and a not-for-profit organization. In their Guangzhou and Beijing locations, they represent foreign and Chinese experimental artists such as Cao Fei and Xu Tan. Part of Mirrored Gardens' concept is to link art and agriculture by creating a temporal and changing space "between architecture and landscape." Adjacent to the galleries, the founders and their employees are developing a garden/research project highlighting permaculture, a set of agricultural principles based on natural ecologies.

Mirrored Gardens is set among lush green fields, in an equestrian center that is part of the agricultural conservation area of Guangzhou's Panyu district. It is conceptually and practically connected to the nearby village of Dongxizhuang. The product of a three-year long collaboration

between Fujimoto and Hu, the design of the buildings mirrors village vernacular architecture. Vitamin Creative Space rents a traditional house in the village where staff, visiting artists, and clients go for meals. They also employ village farmers to help them with their agricultural enterprises. The project exemplifies contemporary Chinese artists' growing engagement with rural and village life.

**Art+Village+City Research Studio** was a 2015 interdisciplinary project led by Margaret Crawford and Winnie Wong, and sponsored by the Global Urban Humanities Initiative at Berkeley. Studio members include twelve graduate students from eight different disciplines, and the work published here represents a collaborative effort of the studio. Of the work published here, Ettore Santi designed the maps and information graphics, José Figueroa produced the art works and dioramas, Valentina Rozas-Krause and Story Wiggins much of the graphic design. More information can be found at <http://artvillage.city>