

Priscilla Briggs
Painter #5 (Huang Wenlong)
2010
Oil Painting
36"H X 54"W



ARTIST STATEMENT:

“At the heart of my work is the questioning of values and identity within the context of economic systems, primarily capitalism. Hoping to create conversation that develops a self-consciousness about how we live and our place within the world, I have approached my subject from both a local and international standpoint to explore the interplay of cultures within the global market.”

Included in the “Outsourcing” section of the Globalization exhibit, Priscillia Briggs’ “Painter #5 (Huang Wenlong)” is a perfect example of the concept of ‘outsourcing.’ In this segment of her work, Briggs traveled to China and took photographs of Chinese “factory painters,” artists who copy popular themes repeatedly to be exported to the Western popular art market. Priced by the square foot (rather than by the work), these artists typically combine their living and studio spaces. As such, Briggs is photographing their homes as well as their work environments. Once her photographs were printed, Briggs then sent them back to China to be enlarged as a painting done by other Chinese “factory painters.” Including postage, the price of the resulting painting is less than or comparable to the cost of having the photograph enlarged in the United States.

Briggs introduces this work with the following statement:

“Wushipu is one of many communities in Xiamen where entire apartment complexes are inhabited by production painters. The production painters fill orders for oil paintings that end up in furniture showrooms, hotels, and tourist art galleries around the world. Although anyone can go online to email a photo to be made into an oil painting and shipped to their front door, many of the orders ask the artist to make multiple copies of the same image. The painters charge by the square foot and by skill level. Common subjects are reproductions of famous paintings. The artists usually focus on one style of painting, specializing in landscapes, van Gogh sunflowers, Degas ballerinas, Thomas Kincaid cottages, etc. I visited the painters to make portraits of them in their live/work spaces. Instead of printing the images, I commissioned paintings of the photographs (for close to the same cost as having an inkjet print made here in the US). I also made photographic prints of still life images of the painters’ live/work spaces. This work explores notions of the “original” work of art and its value, authorship, and the interplay between photography and painting.”

Other examples of her work from Wushipu include:



Painter #1 (Pan Jin)
2010
Oil Painting
36"H X 54"W



Painter #2 (Mr. Lin)
2010
Oil Painting
54"H X 36"W



Painter #3 (Zhong Haibo)
2010
Oil Painting
54"H X 36"W



Painter #4 (Cai Yongsheng)
2010
Oil Painting
54"H X 36"W



Painter #6 (Wang Yizhang)
2010
Oil Painting
36"H X 54"W



Still Life #1
2010
Giclee Print
18"H X 27"W



Still Life #2
2010
Giclee Print
18"H X 27"W



Still Life #3
2010
Giclee Print
18"H X 27"W



Still Life #4
2010
Giclee Print
27"H X 18"W

The remainder of Briggs' body of work is straight photography and video. She examines in a variety of ways the effects of the market economy on society, both at home and abroad.

Briggs graduated from Carnegie-Mellon with a BA in 1989 and earned a MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2000. Currently she is an Associate Professor and Chair in Art and Art History at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN.

Reflecting on her career, she has written: "As a practicing artist, my work has evolved from portraiture to a more concept-driven approach to art-making. Lately, I have focused on themes related to consumerism and capitalism. This focus emerges from a concern for the environment and global economic inequities, as well as an interest in how identity and values are shaped or influenced by advertising and consumerism."

Her video works have been screened in venues such as the Charles Theater in Baltimore, MD, the Women's Caucus for the Arts International Film Festival in Boston, MA, and the School of Visual Arts in New York, NY. Her photography has been exhibited at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Paul Robeson Gallery at Rutgers University, the Manchester Craftsman's Guild in Pittsburgh, Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, the Minnesota Center for Photography in Minneapolis, the Franklin Artworks in Minneapolis, the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, WI, and the Hillstrom Museum at Gustavus. Her work is also included in the Midwestern Photographer's Project at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago.

Other themes Briggs has explored include (with text by the artist):

Fortune

As China straddles an ideological gap between communism and capitalism, its accelerating appetite for material consumerism is reflected in the construction of some of the largest malls in the world. Ms. Fu Yuehong, the general manager of the New Yansha Group, which operates The Golden Resources Mall in Beijing said, "From the beginning we wanted the largest shopping center in the world. We are the country with the most people in the world. We have the fastest growing economy. The largest mall shows our progress as a society." And I believe it shows much more. Created with an eye for scale and a focus on contrasts between east and west, old and new, these photographs examine the retail landscape of China's malls as symbols of its dreams and aspirations.



Crystal
(3.3 Fashion Mall, Beijing)
2008
Lightjet Print
36"H X 48"W



Levels
(MixC Shopping Mall, Shenzhen)
2009
Lightjet Print
36"H X 54"W

The Road to Shantou

China's recent industrial revolution has created densely focused areas where the manufacturing of one product defines entire communities, towns, and regions. The Road to Shantou explores a manufacturing district in Shantou where most of the brassieres in the world are made within the 50 square mile area between Chendian Town, Chaonan and Gurao Town. Each city block is composed almost entirely of businesses oriented toward this single purpose: shops selling sewing machines, surveillance cameras for factories, material and lace, and extra inventory of undergarments; small cottage industries making bra straps, bra cups, bra-pad molds, and shipping containers; large gated factories or freestanding compounds with showrooms and dormitories for migrant workers. The proliferation of images of women in bras and underwear, as advertised on almost every possible surface up and down the streets, is all the more startling when considering China's history of valuing female modesty. The obsequiousness of such imagery in this area speaks to changing moral codes in China as well as the dominance of industry.



Untitled #20
2010
Giclee Print
18"H X 27"W



Untitled #26
2010

Giclee Print
18"H X 27"W



Untitled #29
2010
Giclee Print
27"H X 18"W

Global Market

These photographs were taken in Thailand, Cuba and the Mall of America in Minnesota with an interest in the reciprocal relationship between cultural identity, the nature of merchandise for sale, and advertising images. Within any market, advertising influences the fluctuating balance between supply and demand in that it helps to create desire for merchandise. Within the global market, this dynamic is further complicated by sometimes surreal intersections of culture, as well as imbalances of national wealth and cultural influence. And within tourist markets, the objects for sale are often more a reflection of tourist expectations than an authentic representation of the toured. The global market connects us to one another the world over, linking spiritual, environmental and social issues, both domestic and global, to our consumer habits.



World
2005
Color Coupler Print
20" x 26"
(Mall of America, Bloomington, MN, USA)



Three Girls
2004
Color Coupler Print
20" x 15"



MORE
2007
Color Coupler Print
20" x 15"
(Siam Center, Bangkok, Thailand)

Market

The value of the individual in a capitalist society is as a consumer. Identity is shaped by what one buys. Status is determined by purchasing power. The act of shopping has become a temporary salve of instant gratification, a means of expressing repressed desire, and within the malls of America, an escape into the unreal.

This installation of photographs (large prints accompanied by postcards) examines The Mall of America as a tourist attraction that is a context for the commodity. My intent is to question and reveal the nature of our desires as they are reflected and directed in the space of the mall and in the character of the fetishized commodity. As geographer Jon Goss says, "Only by acknowledging that in our material society our dreams and desires are transformed into wants for commodities will we be able to materialize our visions of authentic life in social form rather than project them onto objects. By embracing and understanding our dreams, we might, like the subject of psychotherapy, come to understand the 'true' object of our repressed desires".



Waste

2006

Postcard

5.5" x 7.5"

postcard text:

THE U.S. HAS 6% OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION AND PRODUCES HALF OF THE WORLD'S GARBAGE.



Pink
2008
postcard
5.5" x 8.5"
postcard text:

AMOUNT THE U.S. WEDDING INDUSTRY WOULD GAIN EACH YEAR IF GAYS WED AT THE SAME RATE AS STRAIGHTS: \$17,000,000,000

AMOUNT THAT U.S. DIVORCE ATTORNEYS WOULD GAIN IF GAYS ALSO DIVORCED AT THE SAME RATE: \$1,900,000,000



Stuffed
2008
Postcard
5.5" x 8.5"
postcard text:

AMOUNT THE U.S. SPENDS ANNUALLY ON IMPORTED TOYS: \$23,631,000,000

AMOUNT SPENT BY THE NEXT TEN HIGHEST TOY-IMPORTING NATIONS
COMBINED: \$21,729,000,000