

Art in America  
05/06/2014  
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## A Kassen

Copenhagen

at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art

by Olga Stefan

View of A Kassen's exhibition "A Kassen Carnegie Art Award 2014," at the Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art.



After its appearance in Stockholm, the Carnegie Art Award exhibition, which featured 17 nominated artists from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, ended its usual tour due to lack of funds, according to the Carnegie Investment Bank Foundation. As the only Danish awardee, the collective A Kassen was invited by the Den Frie, where the exhibition was supposed to travel, to fill the empty spot on its calendar. For their show, A Kassen re-created the original award exhibition and, in so doing, raised questions about authorship, authenticity, value, copyright, modes of production and systems of power in the art world.

The collective sent a digital image of each work that appeared in the Swedish exhibition, consisting of over 100 paintings, sculptures, videos and mixed-medium works, to a factory in China's Xiamen

Painting Village, which specializes in reproductions. Each of these 100 works was produced as a painting on canvas, the lot of which was shipped to the Den Frie. Thus we see paintings of A Kassen's own winning submission to the Carnegie Art Award—examples from the series "The Color of Things." In their original form, the works feature a photo of an object (for example, a chair) next to a panel covered in the pulverized material of the object mixed with a binding agent. In the reproductions, the photographs of the objects are turned into paintings without shadow or depth, and the panels become monochromes. Also on view were copies of works by other artists. The painting of Mette Winckelmann's fabric work was reduced to flat geometric shapes of color. The bulky frames of Alexander Tovborg's mixed-medium paintings were transformed by the Chinese producers into something akin to trompe l'oeil.

On the surface, A Kassen's approach is humorous, and one might have thought that the group was poking fun at the lackluster quality of the Chinese versions. But A Kassen is playing with appropriation and the simulacrum on multiple levels. By outsourcing reproductions from existing reproductions, the collective opens the door to personal interpretation by the Chinese painters, who treat signs with clear meanings to Westerners as mere lines. For example, in Riiko Sakkinen's *57 Varieties* (2013)—a grid of canvases, each in a different shade of red—the printed names of the various colors at the bottom of each piece are not accurately copied. Instead Roman letters are placed together in meaningless configurations. A Kassen rejects any interest in authorship or the aesthetic qualities of the individual objects, but claims ownership of the whole exhibition as an artwork as well as of the process for its coming into being.

The exhibition brought to the fore a critique of the global economy, of which the investment bank is an active participant. Underscoring problems of globalization in which money flows to China while funding for local work is no longer available, it also increased viewers' awareness of the dangers of dependence on powerful sponsors, who can take away as easily as they can give.