

A painting of two hands resting on a light blue surface. The hands are rendered with soft, realistic shading and are positioned horizontally. The background is a textured, light blue wash. Overlaid on the painting is red text.

PAINTING
CHINA
NOW

MAA

ONDREJ
BRODY &
KRISTOFER
PAETAU

**Ondrej Brody
&
Kristofer Paetau**

Painting China Now

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07/12/2013 - 09/02/2014
Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro
Painting China Now (2007)
Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau

This is an "artists eBook" made in parallel to the exhibition of the artists Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. This eBook is not an exhibition catalogue - it is an independent book: a collaboration between the artists and the curator of the exhibition, Luiz Camillo Osorio who wrote the text of this book to accompany details of the 30 paintings commissioned in China by Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau: an installation of 30 paintings in oil on canvas (30 x 40 cm) which can be presented in different ways, according to the space. At the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, the installation was accompanied by the text of the curator, Luiz Camillo Osorio.

Ondrej Brody (born in 1980 in Prague, Czech Republic) & Kristofer Paetau (born in 1972 in Provo, Finland) met in Berlin in 2004 and have been regular collaborators since then. Their artistic strategy is often embarrassing in its literacy and straightforwardness. The criticality of their works could be described as homeopathic in the sense of 'similia similibus curantur' (let like be cured by like).

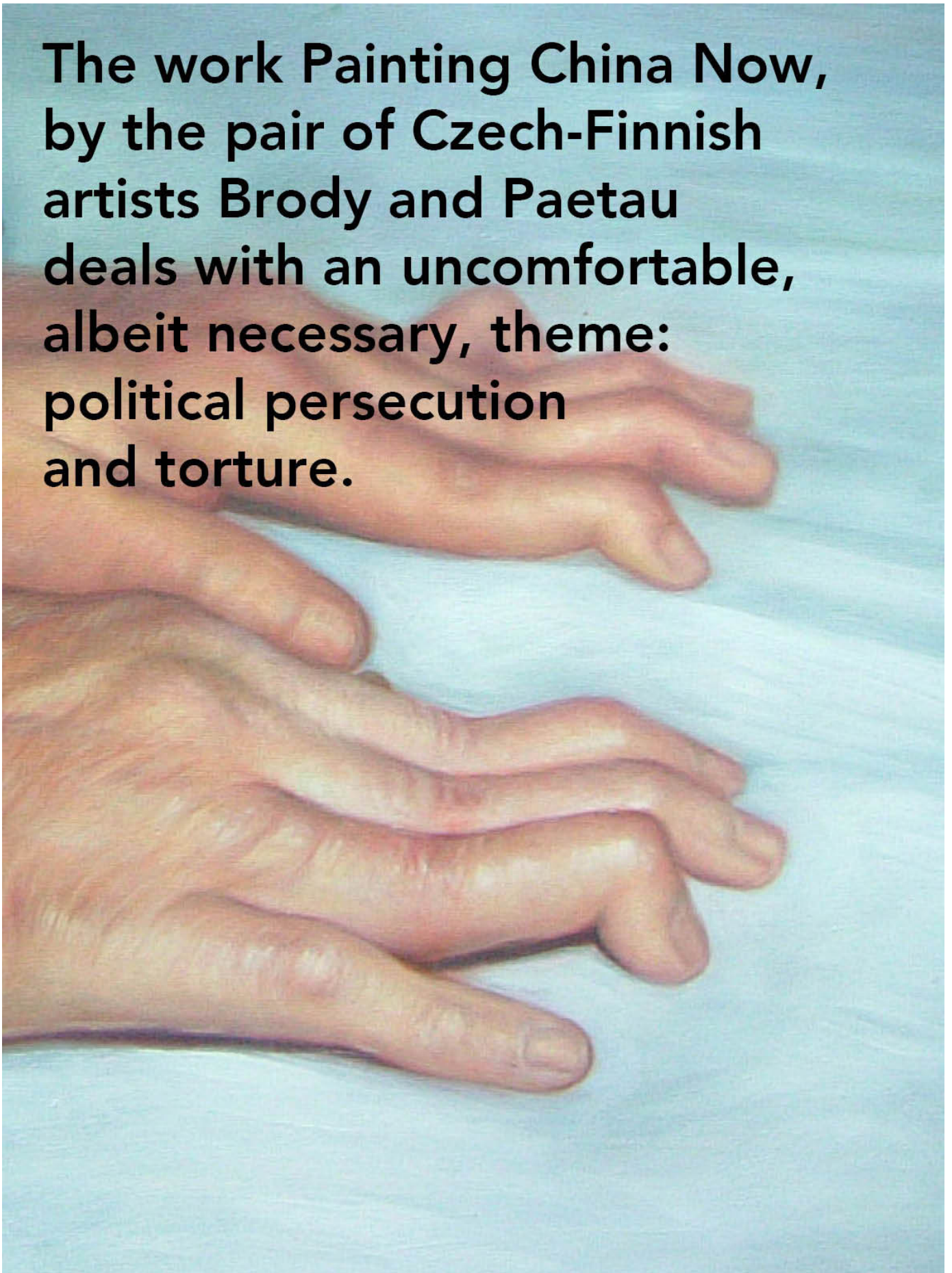
For more information: www.brodypaetau.com
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The work *Painting China Now*, by the pair of Czech-Finnish artists Brody and Paetau deals with an uncomfortable, albeit necessary, theme: political persecution and torture.

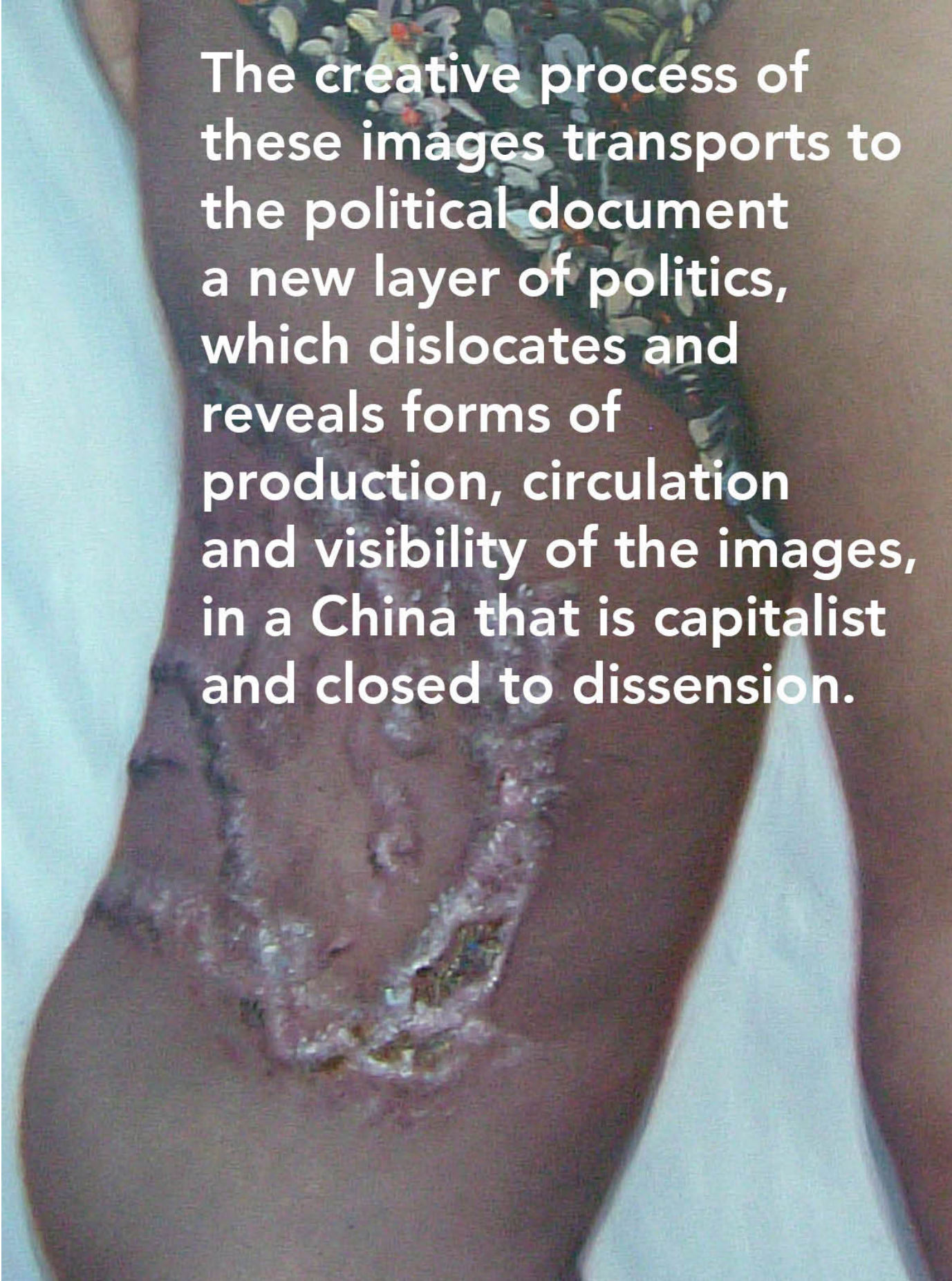


The difficulty is in how to make these images more than just a mere accusation.



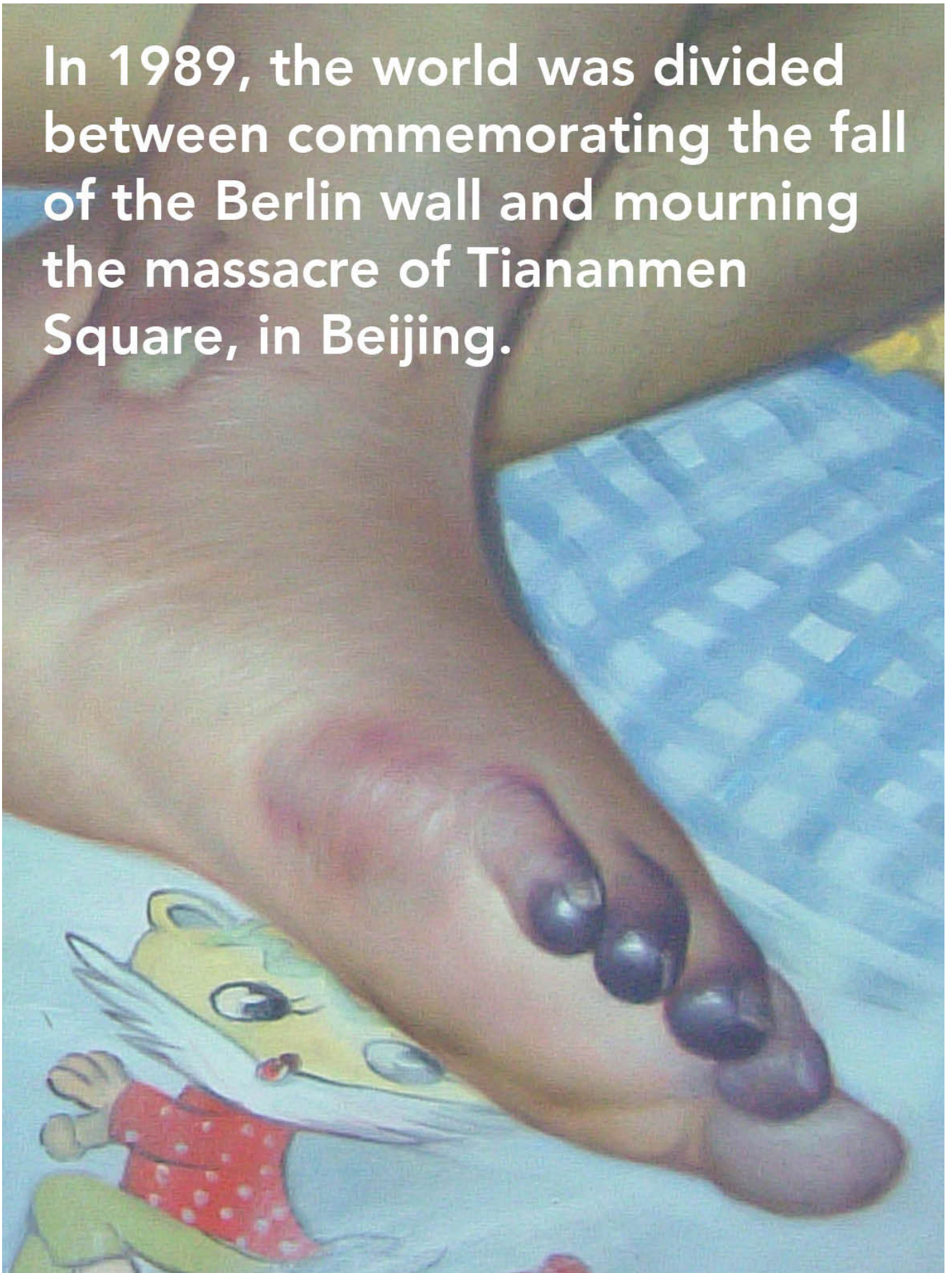


Not that it is unnecessary,
but the addition of critical
layers gives the artistic strategy
an important complexity
and intensity.



The creative process of these images transports to the political document a new layer of politics, which dislocates and reveals forms of production, circulation and visibility of the images, in a China that is capitalist and closed to dissension.

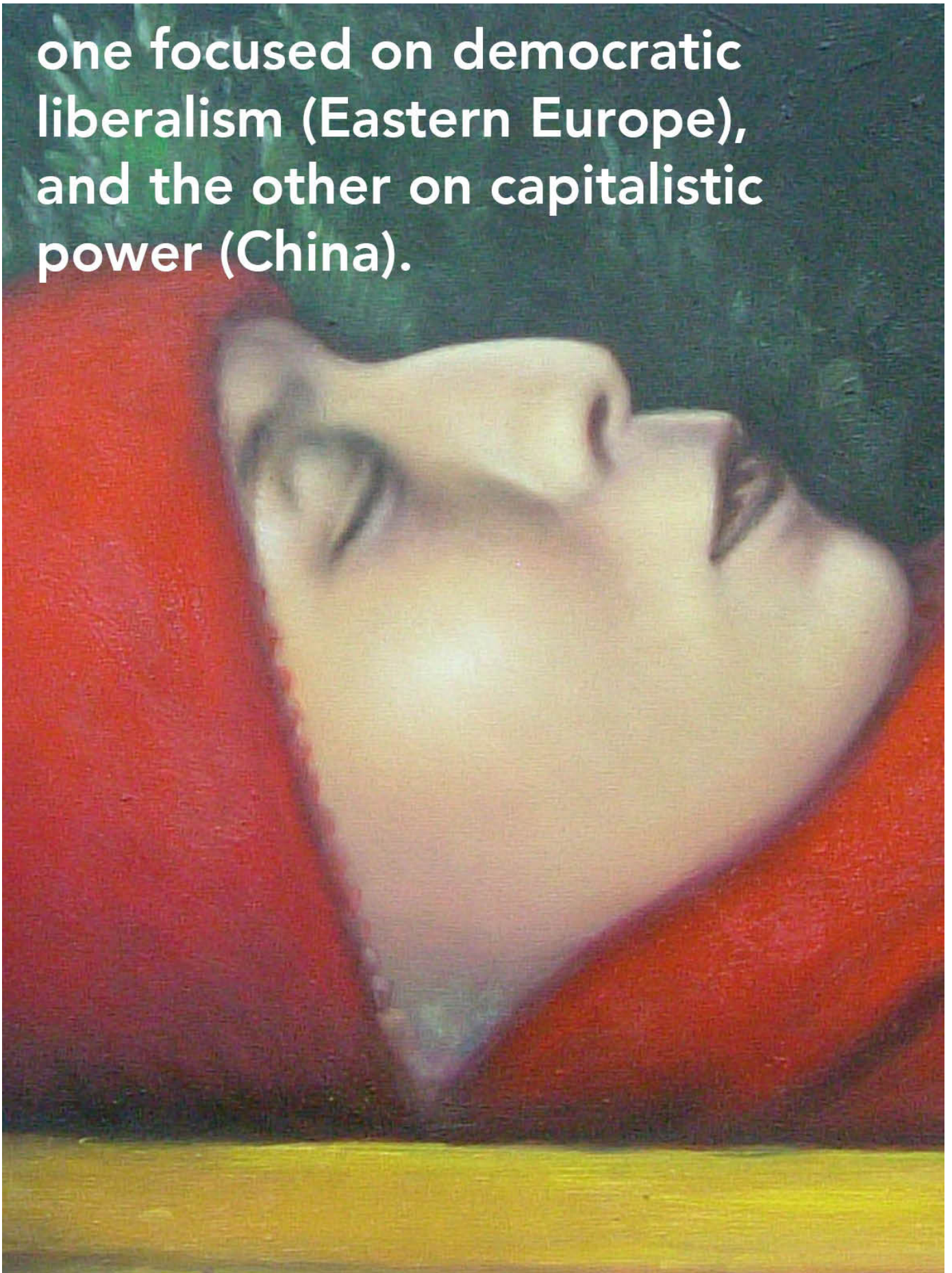
In 1989, the world was divided between commemorating the fall of the Berlin wall and mourning the massacre of Tiananmen Square, in Beijing.



**Two different paths were there
defined for the old communist
world:**



one focused on democratic liberalism (Eastern Europe), and the other on capitalistic power (China).



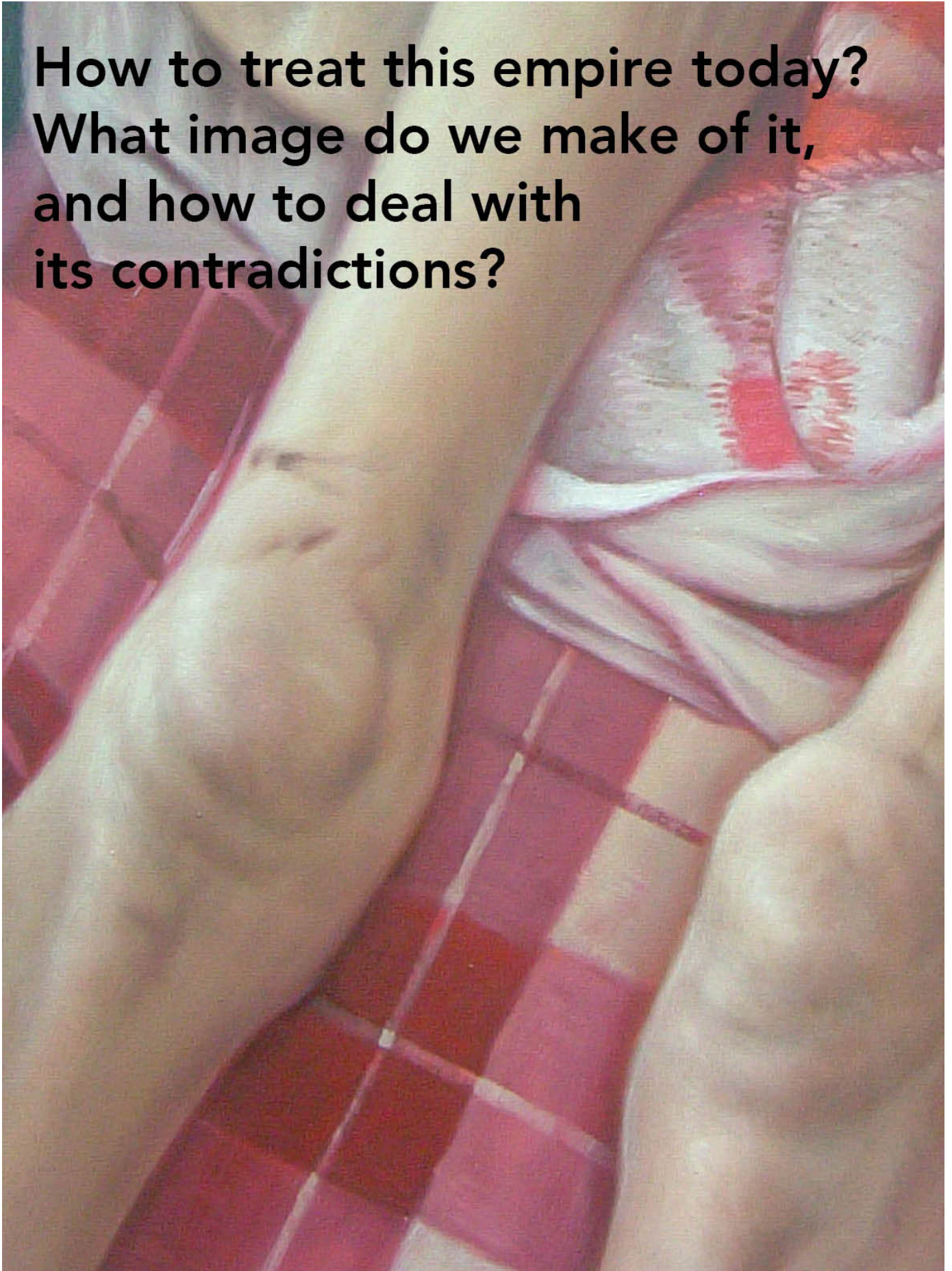
Unfortunately, attention seems to have been given to the latter, "the successful".



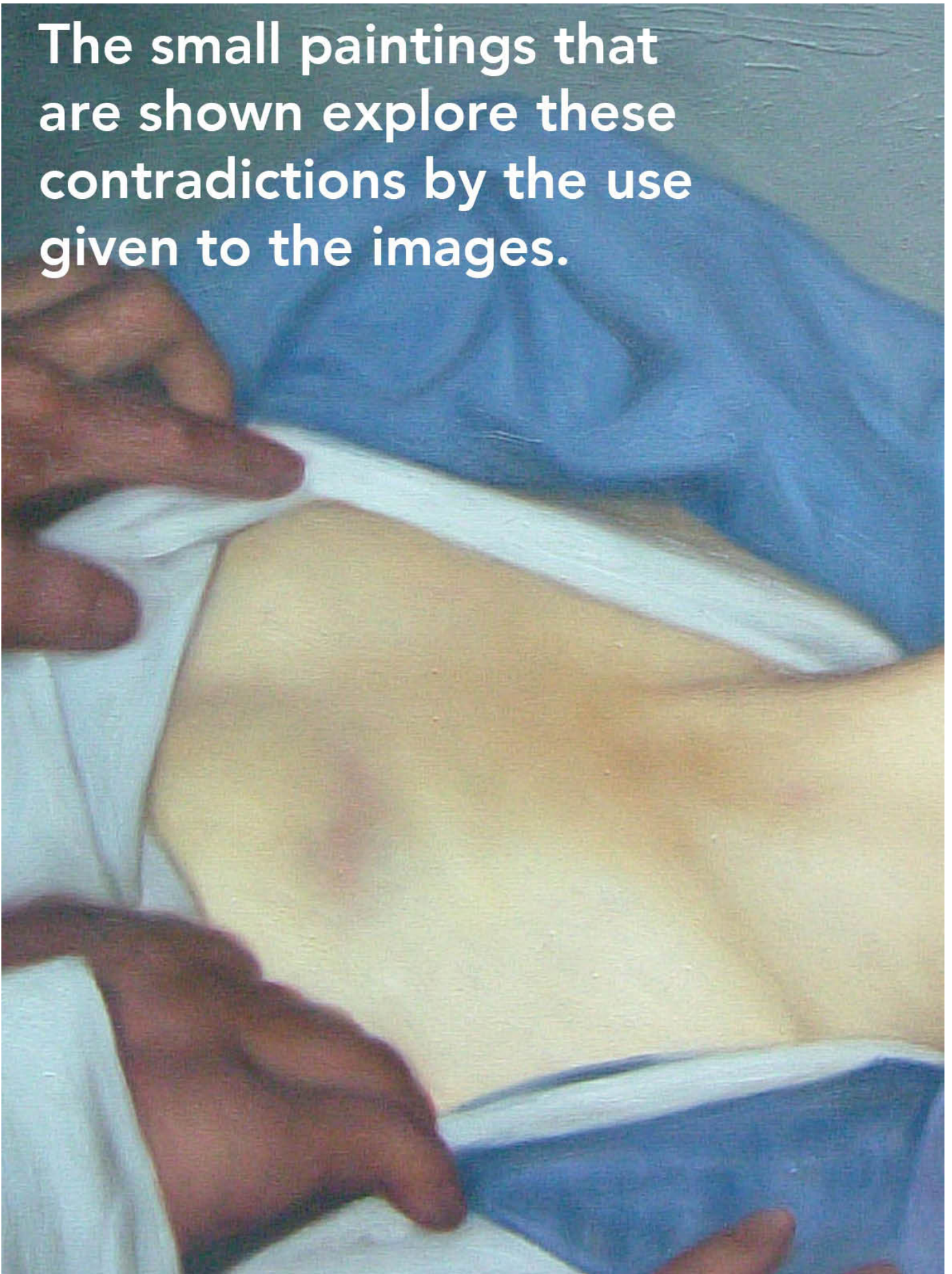


China is a
frightening
giant – with
its growing
GDP and
censorship.

**How to treat this empire today?
What image do we make of it,
and how to deal with
its contradictions?**



The small paintings that are shown explore these contradictions by the use given to the images.



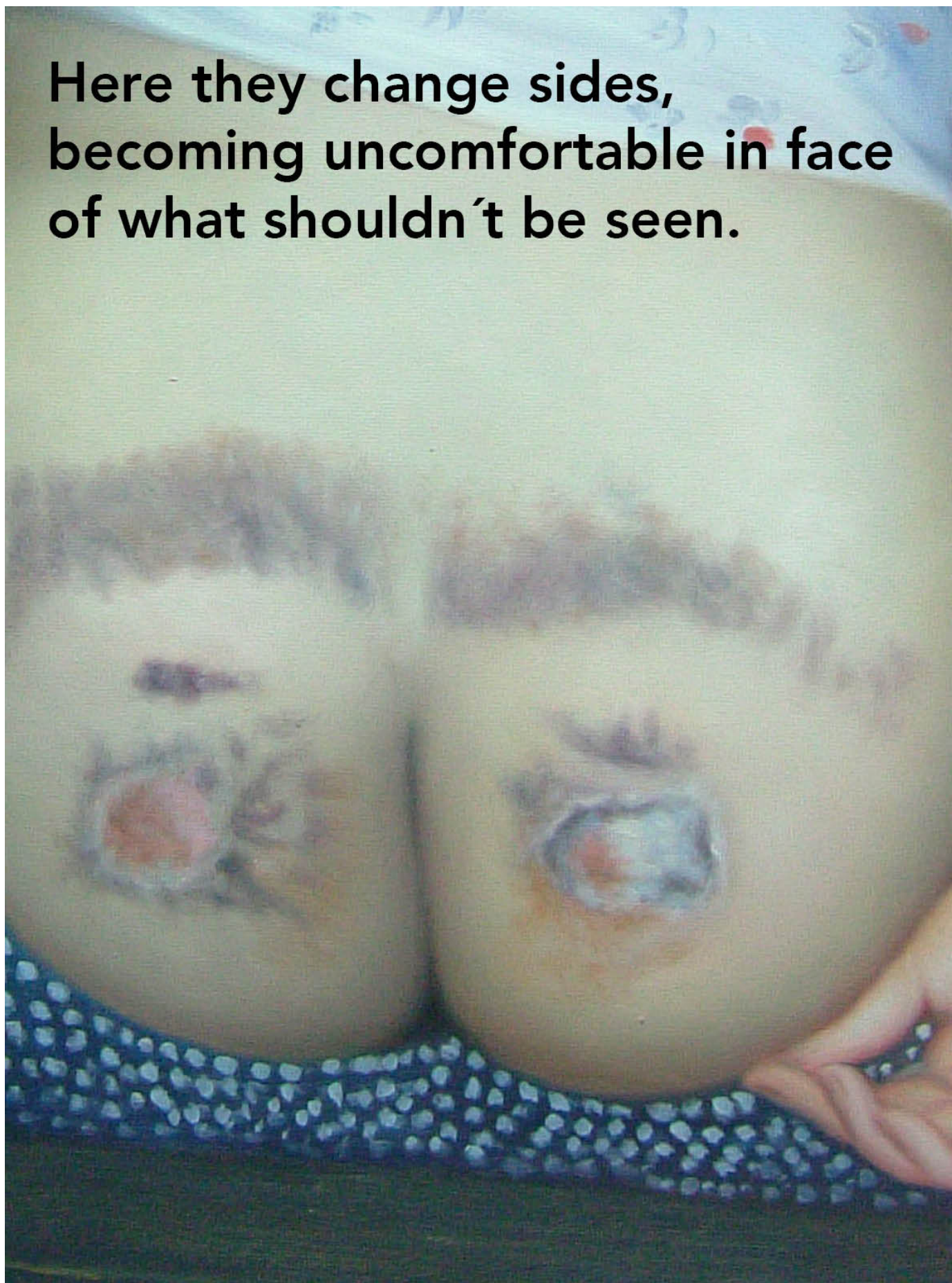
Contradictions that are explained by a combination of the grotesque and kitsch.





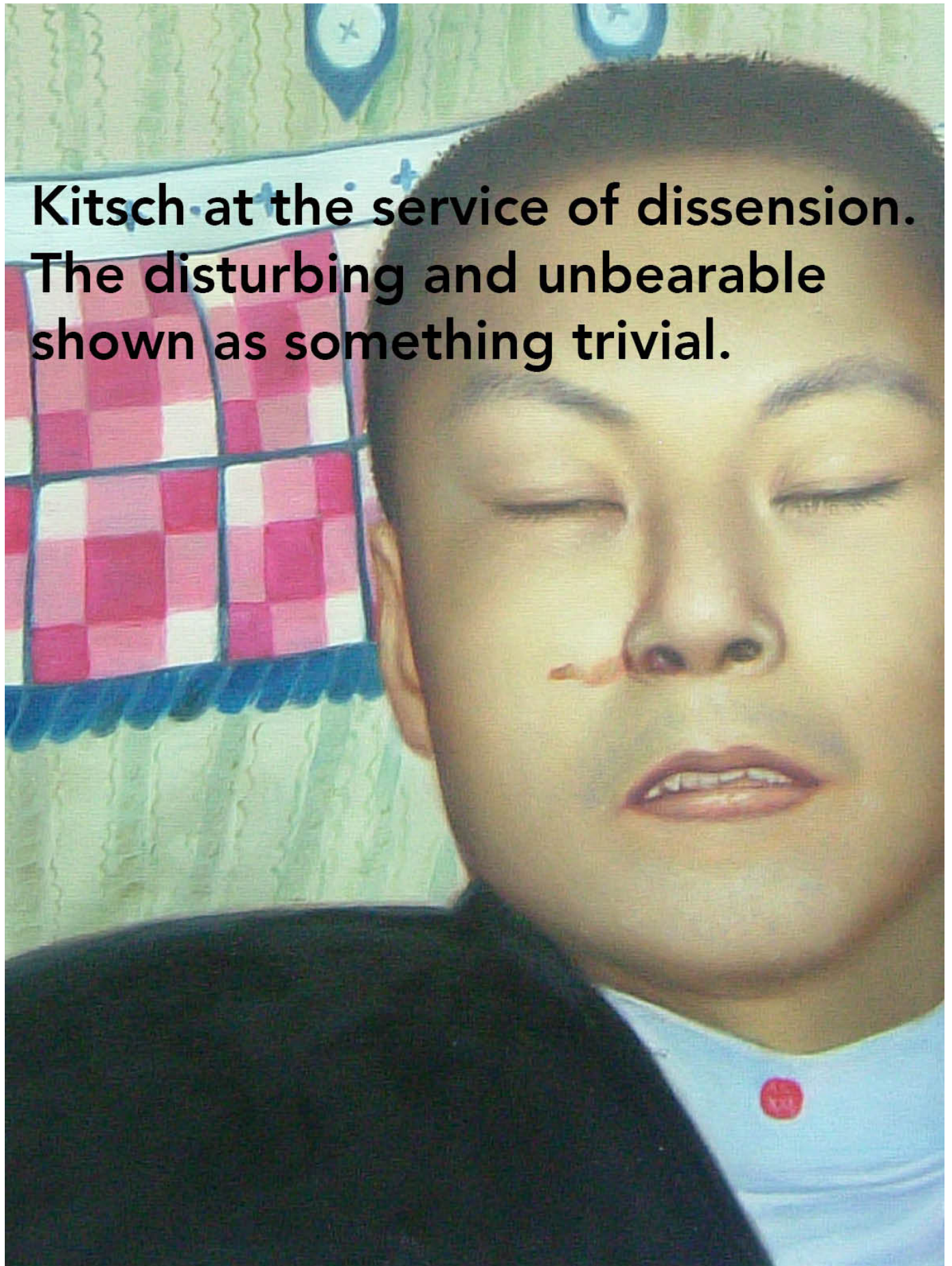
Chinese ateliers where painters make copies of pictures by Western precepts are well-known. The faithful and sugary reproductions of these copyists have always been a point of consensus.

**Here they change sides,
becoming uncomfortable in face
of what shouldn't be seen.**



The naturally healthy difficulty we all have in seeing what is terrible is elevated to the highest power.



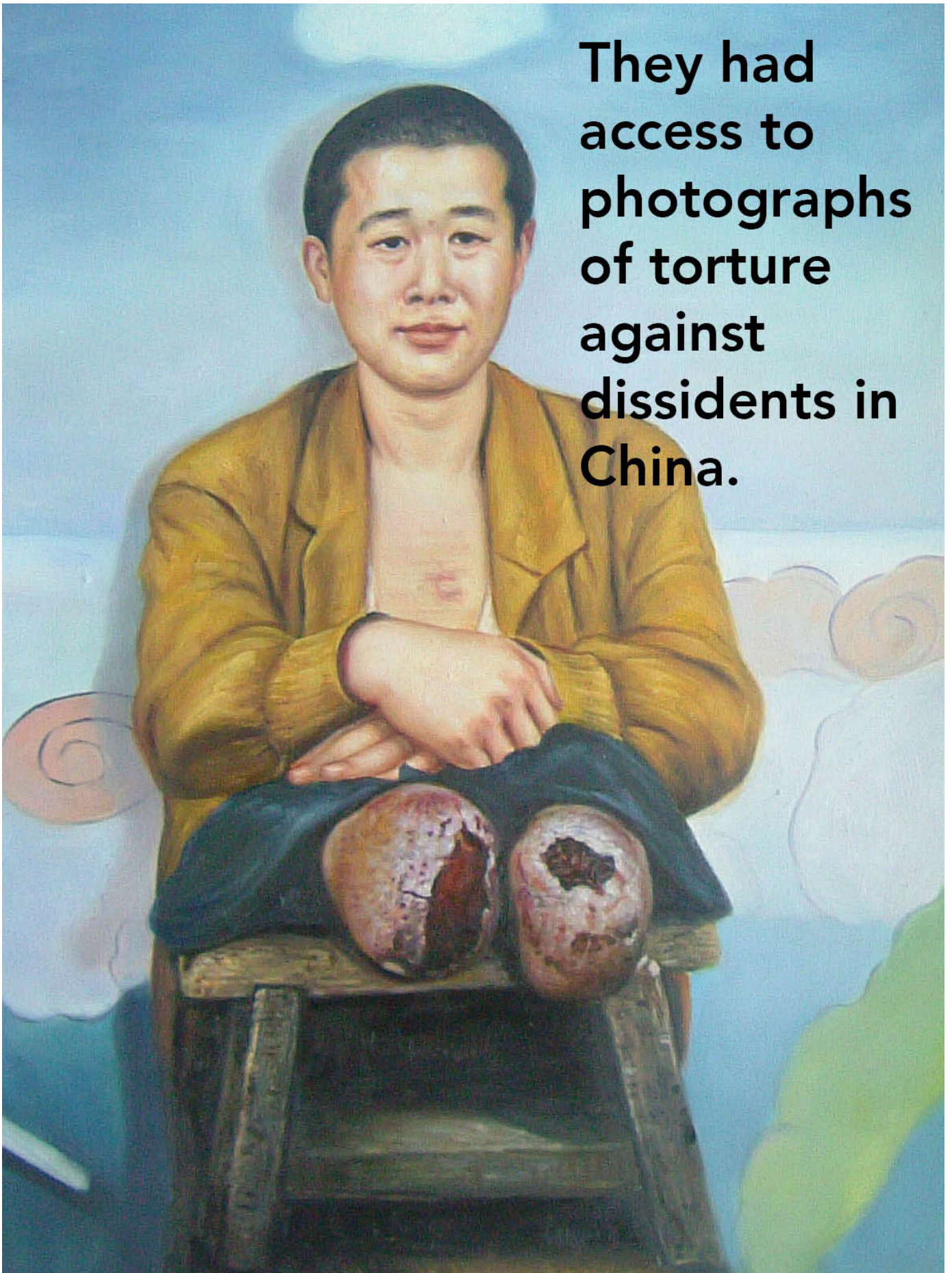


**Kitsch at the service of dissension.
The disturbing and unbearable
shown as something trivial.**

The strategy of artists Ondrej Brody and Kristofer Paetau also explores Chinese idiosyncrasies.



**They had
access to
photographs
of torture
against
dissidents in
China.**



They got in touch with twenty reproduction ateliers to make copies according to normal reproduction standards. Only two agreed to make the copies.




**Some of them are shown here,
the photographs (also) paint
China as it is today.**

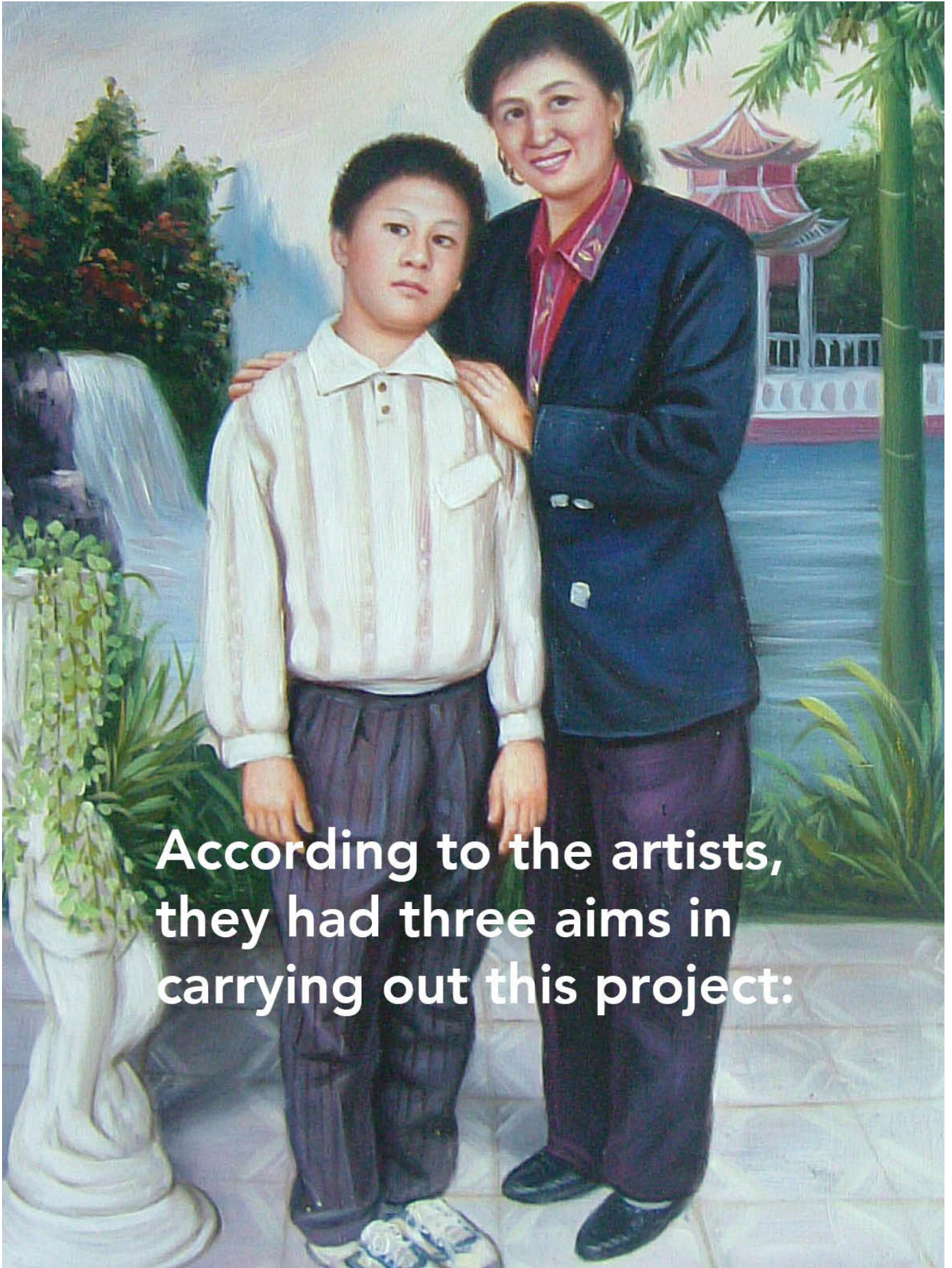




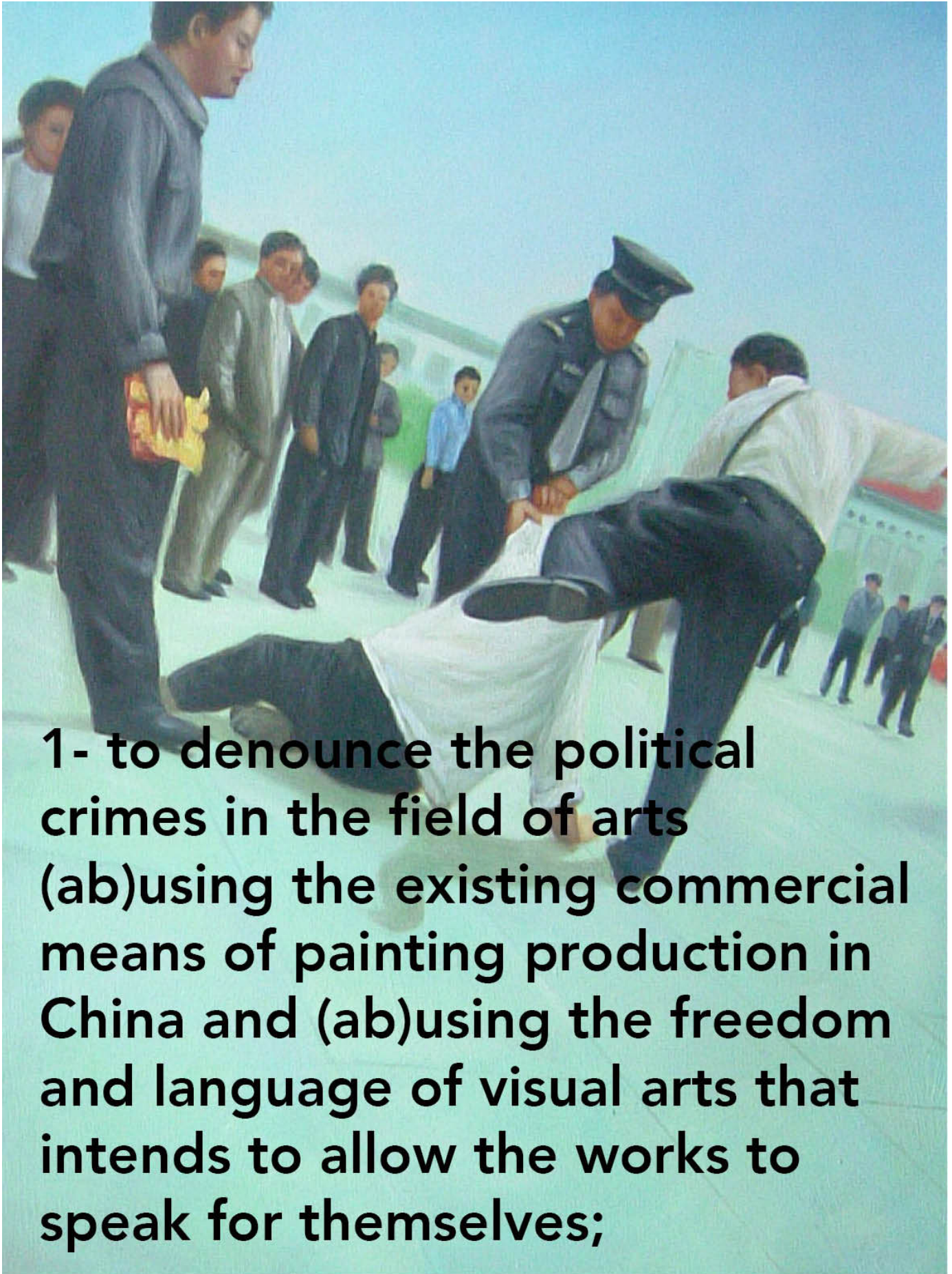
**Perverting
political
standards:
copying what
is forbidden.
Perverting
artistic
standards:
promoting
copies.
Perverting
representation
standards:
separating
form and
content.**



The images were found on an American site about a spiritual group, Falun Dafa, persecuted in China for his spiritual practice and its rapid growth, it already has seventy million followers since its foundation in the beginning of 1990.

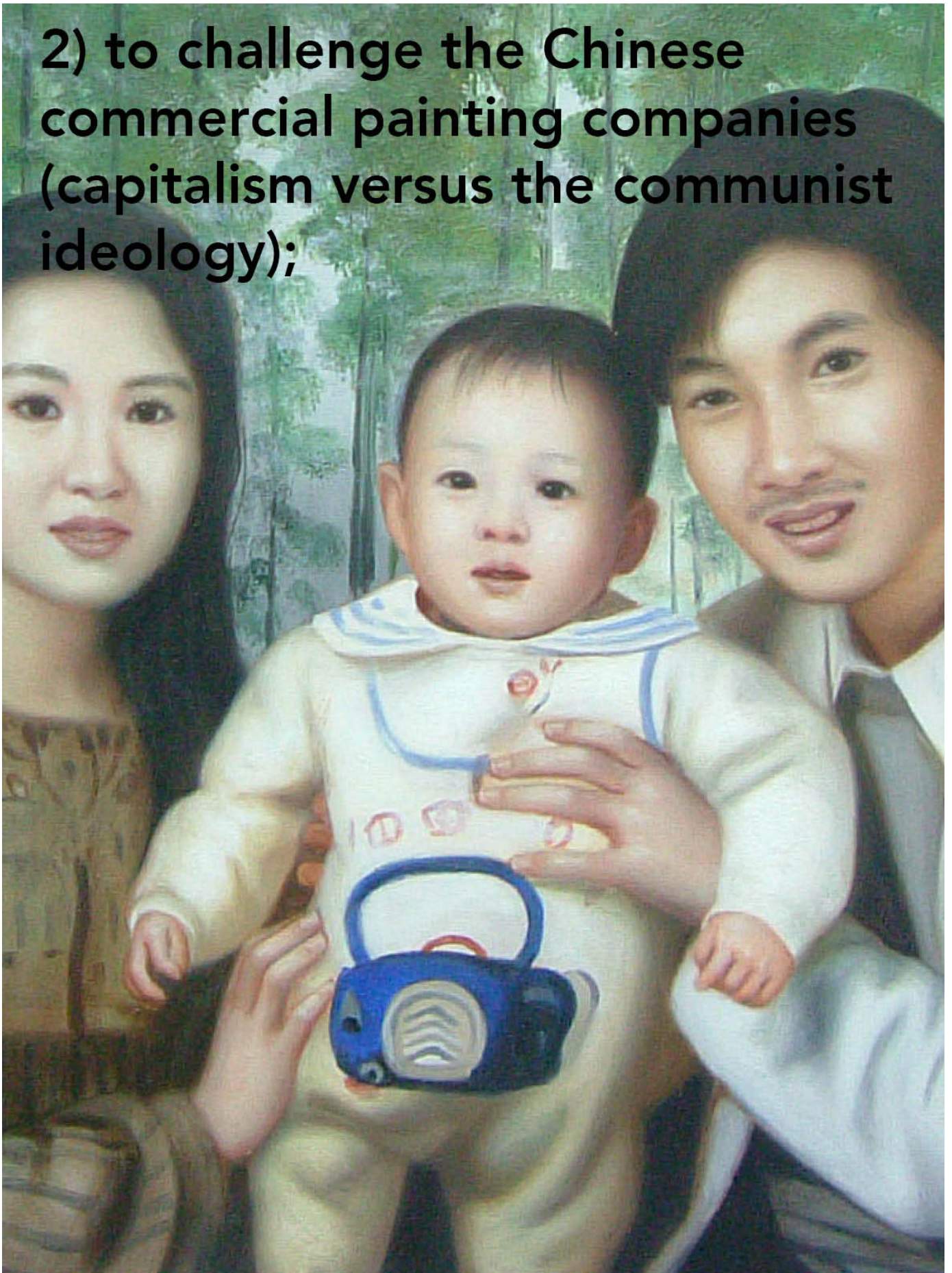


**According to the artists,
they had three aims in
carrying out this project:**



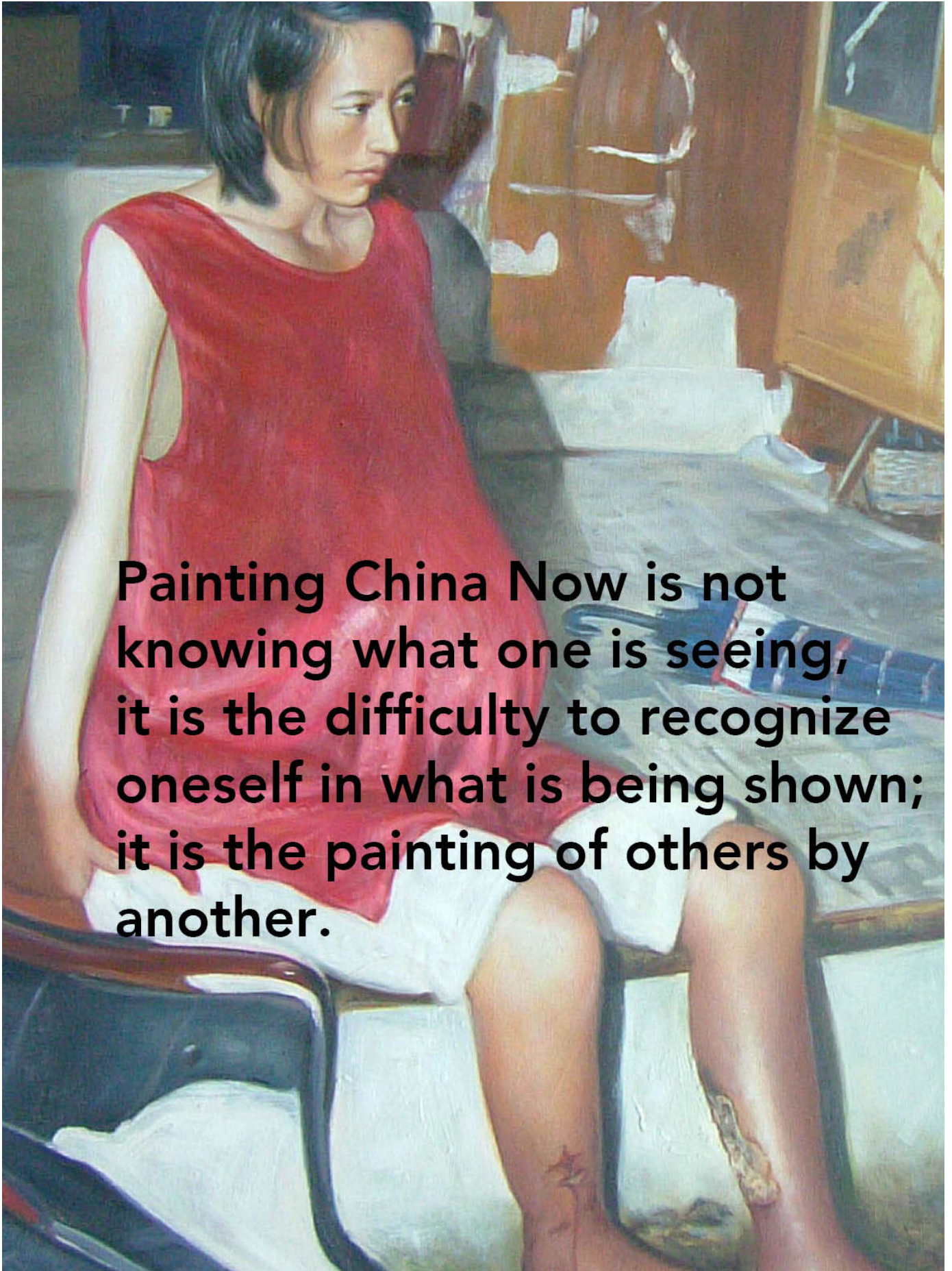
1- to denounce the political crimes in the field of arts (ab)using the existing commercial means of painting production in China and (ab)using the freedom and language of visual arts that intends to allow the works to speak for themselves;

2) to challenge the Chinese commercial painting companies (capitalism versus the communist ideology);

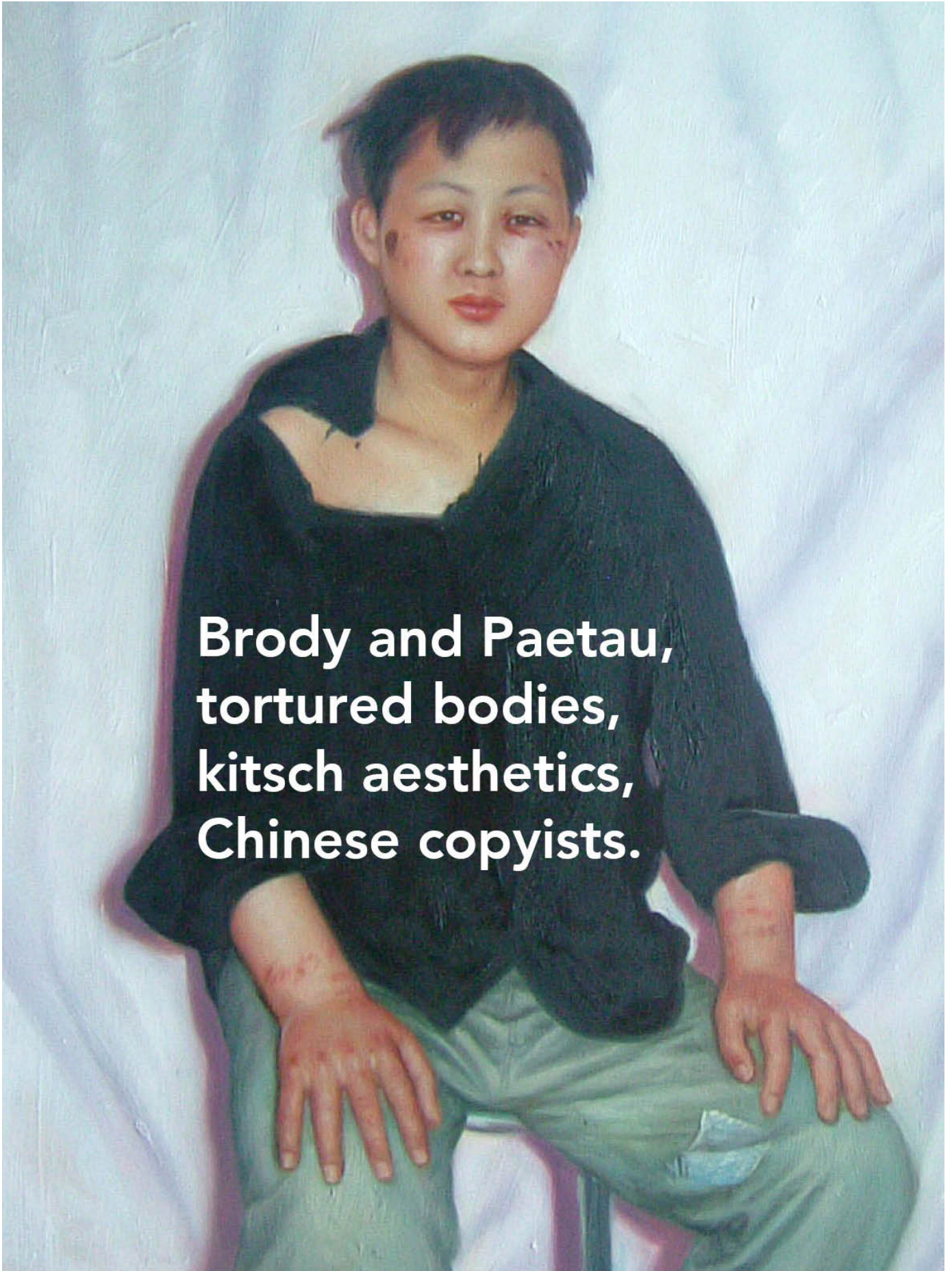


3) to criticize the world of arts in total euphoria with the Chinese market - its exotic appeal and the desire of gallery owners to gain the market of Chinese collectors.





Painting China Now is not knowing what one is seeing, it is the difficulty to recognize oneself in what is being shown; it is the painting of others by another.



**Brody and Paetau,
tortured bodies,
kitsch aesthetics,
Chinese copyists.**

It is the composition of these heterogeneous elements that we find disturbing. More than an accusation, it is the traumatic injury of that which cannot be made natural.





**A final message to our visitor:
forgive us for the discomfort,
the world is not for amateurs.**

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