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Analysing contemporary acts of destruction against historic artistic artefacts in relation to

Walter Benjamin's theory of authenticity



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Abstract

Ai Weiwei and Jake and Dinos Chapman use the Art of Destruction by igniting conversation, reconstructing authenticity and demanding attention to contemporary politics. In the case of this text, the artists do not destroy their own artwork, but instead take readymade objects, creating what will be argued to be a double layer of authenticity. In the destruction of readymades, Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers build on the authenticity and aura of images that already exist, and destructing them in contemporary settings makes their artworks aggressive and additive rather than dismissive in their ruin. Using Walter Benjamin's theory of authenticity in his 'Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility,' I will expand on how a new authenticity is formed because of this new context and environment that develops with destruction, whilst battling with the power and presence of digital technology.

Introduction

This thesis looks to explore how two pieces of art, one a sketch over a print and one a black and white photographic triptych, use forms of destruction to comment on political issues that challenge authenticity, aura, and the subsequent impact of those works on the English contemporary art market. In this essay, destruction will be seen in conversation with humour, and how this retains art's authenticity. The artists used will be Jake and Dinos Chapman (the Chapman brothers, b.1966, b.1962 respectively, London, United Kingdom) and Ai Weiwei (b.1957, Beijing, China.)

Art functioning in a political realm rather than through ritual value is a theory that occurs when the criteria for authenticity is removed. This idea is held by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) who will be the main theorist focusing on his 'The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility' (1935).¹ This theory has risen in contexts where the creation of art is often no longer made for religious or ceremonial purposes, but rather for high exhibition value or what its 'cult value' might be.² For Benjamin, "art of the past is given an after-life by the occasion of its 'now' possible reinterpretation in terms of the changes on a conceptual level demanded by developments on the technical."³ Using this text allows for the discussion of the importance of aura, and the trouble with reproducibility. He comments:

"The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in its Technological Reproducibility' 1936 19

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter.”⁴

This gives an understanding of the importance of history that surrounds an authentic work of art. “The destruction of some false or deceptive form of experience as the productive condition of the construction of a new relation to an object” is what starts the idea of destruction igniting conversation.⁵ Furthermore, Benjamin defines authenticity in a piece of art as having the presence in time and space that is unique to its creation, and when or if this piece of art is reproduced, authenticity is lost.⁶ His viewpoint is the same when it comes to defining this term outside of art. Something genuine, original and not a copy is what defines authenticity. This thesis will therefore look at authenticity in regard to political situations as well as in regard to the inclusion of the self. This text will look into the possibility of Ai Weiwei being aware of the loss of aura around authenticity because of how his triptych can be duplicated, and if this leads to authenticity losing importance in the conversation with destruction. And in the case of the Chapman brothers, does their work alternatively being so hard to duplicate come from such direct destructions of Goya’s prints, and therefore can its authenticity be tampered with?

In addition to Benjamin, a second theorist this thesis will use is Michael Foucault because of his recognition of the connection between power and freedom and the importance of the environment in which a work of art is made. In a way this is similar to Benjamin and his discussion of aura, but Foucault has more of a focus on the political aspects of works of art.

⁴ Benjamin, 13

⁵ Jennifer L. Walden, *Art and Destruction*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 1

⁶ Benjamin, 13

Nicola Brown is another important source because of her comments specifically on the Chapman brothers. She writes on the power of creating art in its ugliness, and how this can be seen as a layer of authenticity in a totally different light. In regards to Ai Weiwei, Gereon Sievernich's text accompanying the exhibition 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' will be used because he writes "Ai Weiwei touches upon issues of authenticity and identity, upon question about the aura of objects as well as their construction and deconstruction."⁷

The term destruction in this essay will take on two different meanings. Both meanings will be used to explore the impact of destruction of art in terms of authenticity and the placement of works on the contemporary art market. Specifically for this thesis, looking back to Benjamin's quote on creating a new relation to an object via destruction is helpful because of the conversation destruction initiates and the meaning of destruction in the work of art. If destruction is to destroy the false set of conditions that are placed on something and to create a new view of that particular object, it could be seen to make new relationships with objects by destroying false relationships. Today, art that is placed in museums and galleries is perceived with such respect that it is automatically given space and lighting that does not threaten its existence. Therefore, when art represents destruction, or is in itself destroyed, there is a sense of performative characteristics that may not have originally been present. When looking at Benjamin's idea of authenticity and destruction it is therefore impossible to not take into consideration his use of the word 'reproducibility.'

Furthermore when thinking about authenticity, Benjamin becomes involved with the idea of aura. Benjamin argues that aura becomes lost when a work of art is duplicated, and that the

⁷ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 40

setting of which an artwork is created is its most important environment. By aura, Benjamin refers to the feeling that surrounds an original work based on where it was created and what surrounded it during creation as well as original context of display.⁸ However, there have always been duplications in art, from students practising from masters, to the development of printmaking.⁹ For Benjamin, aura is lost in this process of duplication, and subsequently a work of art becomes less authentic and, therefore, “the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.”¹⁰ He fundamentally argues that the crisis of modernity comes with this lack of authenticity. However, this thesis will attempt to demonstrate how contemporary works of art can engage with issues of aura and authenticity by engaging in, and then continuing discussions with, reproductions of art from the past. Engaging with Benjamin again here, this thesis will further look at his comments on destruction which will be analysed specifically in regards to the impact that humour has on social involvement.¹¹ What Benjamin does is say that when an experience of the past is altered by destruction, a new relation to that very experience emerges. He will be used for this thesis therefore because of his understanding of political art, and what factors contribute to the intricacies of this type of art.

What destruction means for Ai Weiwei

For Ai Weiwei, his use of destruction in his triptych comes hand in hand with understanding the relevance of the Cultural Revolution. This revolution was a reign of terror, determined to eliminate cultures of the past. Launched in May 1966, the Cultural Revolution lasted over a decade, bankrupting the country of cultural wealth and imposing the strong fist of Mao’s

⁸ Ibid., 31

⁹ Benjamin, 9-10

¹⁰ Ibid., 21

¹¹ Benjamin, 50

communism.¹² Mao will be discussed more later in this essay as someone who Ai Weiwei embodies in his triptych, creating a conversation around the difference between total destruction and destruction that is caused to create political awareness and change. Ai Weiwei, included himself in his work and limited his printed series to only eight copies. This limited the official prints that could have been bought and sold on the art market. This restriction builds authenticity because the time of creation was the most unique. Furthermore, Ai Weiwei uses a traditional object in his photographs. This tradition goes hand in hand with authenticity, there is a sense of validity in the representation of an urn that holds such cultural significance. Equally, Ai Weiwei does not create anything new with this use of an artefact, moreover is this work really unique to its creation?

Ai Weiwei's *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1994). (Fig. 4.) triptych of black and white photographs depicts the artist, activist and humanitarian holding, then releasing and dropping an urn, apparently from the Han Dynasty. Culturally, these urns possess huge significance in China because they were initially used as grave furnishings, and subsequently bad luck to collect due to their part in a burial ritual.¹³ Created during the period, 25 BCE - 220 CE, urns from the Han Dynasty were intricately made personal objects to be buried alongside the wealthiest of patrons. The preservation of these urns was especially important due to the belief that they went with the dead to the afterlife. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971) under Chairman Zedong Mao Zedong (1966-1976), the urns began to be systematically destroyed.¹⁴ Mao's policy of removing the 'four olds' (ideas, customs, culture and habits) included these

¹² Tom Phillips 'Cultural Revolution' The Guardian, 2016 Accessed 03/12/20
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>

¹³ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 46

¹⁴ Thomas Philips 'The Cultural Revolution: all you need to know about China's political convulsion' The Guardian 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>

historic masterpieces, which possessed both artistic and cultural value.¹⁵ Ai Weiwei dropping one of these urns, that he bought himself for apparently thousands of dollars according to Ruth Epstein from The Art Story, is a direct comment on Mao's politics of destruction.¹⁶ Ai Weiwei throws light on the brutality of this destruction by himself destroying an urn. In a similar way to Goya, Ai Weiwei's "aesthetic ideas are not bound by theoretical principles" and there is nothing that stops him from creating imagery that reflects his personal political leanings.¹⁷ The simplicity of his work allows for the absurd nature of destruction to take hold. Here the idea of humour is presented plainly, mocking the past leader without a shadow of remorse for the implications of what Ai Weiwei ignites.

What destruction means for the Chapman brothers

On the other hand, the Chapman brothers, they used child-like drawing which holds authenticity in its direct personalisation of the print. It has been written that the Chapman brothers took pages from their childhood stories to complete their *Gigantic Fun* series (Fig. 1.).¹⁸ Authenticity can therefore be found in the Chapman brothers *Gigantic Fun* because of this personalisation of the Goya prints. This makes the series feel authentic because as a viewer or a consumer we are gaining an insight into the personal lives of the Chapman brothers.

To understand how destruction generates space for a continuation of aura and authenticity, this thesis will expand on the power of humour that comes from destruction, and how that therefore implicates the world art markets and discussions. The Chapman brothers create art

¹⁵ Austin Ramzy 'China's Cultural Revolution Explained' New York Times, 2016. Accessed 05/04/21

¹⁶ Ruth Epstein and The Art Story Contributors 'Ai Weiwei – Artist Overview and Analysis' The Art Story March 2016 Accessed 20/05/21 <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/ai-weiwei/artworks/>

¹⁷ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 9

¹⁸ David Risley Gallery 'Jake and Dinos Chapman' Accessed 27/03/21 <http://www.davidrisleygallery.com/artists/jake-and-dinos-chapman>

that has been perceived as destructive in its ugly, evil and startling imagery and engage with the art market as part of their practice, having bought one of the few original print editions of Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes' *Desastres de la Guerra* (*Disasters of War*) series, before drawing over them and selling them back on the art market for a considerable profit alongside the aim of reigniting a conversations (Fig. 2). A drawing over a print from their *series Gigantic Fun*, specifically etching 79/81 will be the main comparative piece for this thesis. (Fig. 3.) As mentioned, this series involved the Chapman brothers acquiring eighty two prints of the *Desastres de la Guerra* (*Disasters of War*) series in 1990 which they left almost totally untouched for the next ten years.¹⁹ After this period of time, the Chapman brothers then systematically and intricately drew over the historic Goya prints with sketches apparently from childhood colouring and picture books.²⁰ This was seen as a direct destruction of an immensely important piece of Goya's art, at the same time causing uproar and mass interest.²¹ Uproar from these actions come from a few different reasons. One is because Goya was amongst the first artists in the 1800s to begin creating art that reflected the artists political views, rather than the commissioners.²² Many of the prints Goya made were subsequently destroyed for this very reason and his political views not conforming with the powers that be. Depicting those who were losing the war, rather than the war heroes, was anti-patriotic, and this is what led to Goya's works, the ones that survived, being shown only after his death. However, there is strength in the continuation of conversation that the Chapman brothers initiate. Destroying

¹⁹ Madison T. Rendall, 'Goya Reclaimed: Contemporary artists' appropriation of Francisco de Goya's work for a contemporary consumption' May 2019, Accessed 18/03/21
<https://uh-ir.tdl.org/handle/10657/4481>. 11

²⁰ Sarah Kent 'Jake and Dinos Chapman: The Sum of all Evil at White Cube' 2013 Accessed 04/03/21
<http://inhalemag.com/jake-dinos-chapman-the-sum-of-all-evil-at-white-cube/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dario Gambon 'The Destruction of Art – Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution' Reaktion Press, 1997. United Kingdom 141

Goya's prints at the time they were created was to end a political conversation, but the brothers destroy the prints in the contemporary world to re-ignite the same conversation. Critiques and articles around these works of art called out their destruction, even though the Chapman brothers claimed destruction was not their main purpose.

Here is where the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei come into comparison. The two pieces of artworks utilise events of the past that were culturally or physically destructive to a population. The works subsequently take these past atrocities and interpret them in a way that raises awareness of the past issues and comments on the state of information travel. Both works of art destruct in different ways, but they both fall under the category of Art of Destruction. By definition, Art of Destruction is a theme in the contemporary art world where artists "attempt to break wholly with the ideological traditions of the past and, through a variety of destructive processes to create something honest, positive and true."²³ Emphasising the importance of destructive art comes from the history of its development. As an art form, the Art of Destruction began, and still remains, generally focused on performance, in which an artist is shown destroying their own piece of work.²⁴ Typically these works involved cutting, assaulting and burning -- destroying the simple way we witness the world as a whole.²⁵ The definition of the Art of Destruction is also crucial in connection with the political comparisons that will be made in this essay. Furthermore, Kerry Brougher (b. 1952) comments "there is something about destruction right now, not only in art but in society in general, that is calling this

²³ Roberto Marrone, 'Rip it, burn it, tear it, cut it - the art of destruction' 2016 Post-War and Contemporary Art Accessed 16/11/20 <https://www.christies.com/features/The-art-of-destruction-in-the-1950s-7006-1.aspxz>

²⁴ Elena Martinique 'What Banksy's Prank at Sotheby's Could Mean for His Market – and Art at Large' 2018 Accessed 17/03/21 <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/banksy-prank-sothebys-art-market>

²⁵ Barbara Pollack, 'Under Destruction' June 2021 ARTnews Accessed 02/04/21 <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/under-destruction-551/>

[destruction] back to attention.”²⁶ His work gives access to the importance of destructive art today, especially destructive art that sparks conversation with the work it destructs. What is crucial to note is that although technically these works of art may fall under this category, in both cases, from an act of destruction something new is created. The ownership and subsequent destruction of both artworks has created a brand that disrupts the capitalisation of experience of art and art markets, and in choosing such different cultural settings of art works, this thesis will be able to explore these concepts.

Politics of *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* and *Gigantic Fun*

The use of the Chapman brother’s drawing over a Goya print will be done because of the political significance of both the Goya print itself, and the act of destruction that occurred when the brothers drew over it. Jake and Dinos Chapman together bought many of the eighty-one original *Los Desastres de la Guerra (Disasters of War)* prints by Goya.²⁷ The brothers attach their own artistic style in the form of sketches from children’s colouring books over the prints as an act of defacing. Works of art as political statements of the artist rather than from the commissioner came around 1800, with artists such as Goya himself.²⁸ Goya created this series in response to the battle of the Napoleonic wars as a way to depict the failings and horrors that the Spanish people were dealing with. As the second series of works after *Los Caprichos*, and before his famous *Third of May* painting from 1808, numbered from 1-81, his *Los Desastres de la Guerra (Disasters of War)* works were made over a period of ten years from 1810, with all but three plates being published in 1863, thirty-

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The ability for the brothers to do this will be explored in Chapter Four – Art Market and Destruction

²⁸ Dario Gambon ‘The Destruction of Art – Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution’ Reakton Press, 1997, London, United Kingdom, 141

five years after his death.²⁹ This delay was down to a combination of issues. At the time, there was no interest from the government to become patrons to such troubling art. Goya's political views were against the state, threatening his position in society.³⁰ He depicted atrocities specifically this cruelty inflicted on the Spanish by Napoleon's soldiers during the Peninsular War. Not only depicting war crimes, Goya represented the lack of socio-economic care the Spanish during the war, and the long term impact this had on the country. Goya's prints lack beauty in their harsh absence of aesthetics, "all the trappings of the spectacular have been eliminated: the landscape is an atmosphere, a darkness, barely sketched in. War is not a spectacle."³¹ Etching 79 of the Chapman's *Gigantic Fun* series depicts one of the most famous of Goya's prints where the viewer becomes witness to the mutilation of three young men, all of whom have been dismembered and tied independently from each of their body parts to a tree. Over the top of this print, the Chapman brothers have drawn a playful childhood image of four cats in a bathtub. Politically, the Chapman brothers created this work to make a point that the strong rules of the contemporary art market can be broken by destructive art and that destruction can initiate a further conversation. In terms of the art market, they attempt to dismantle aesthetics with their obscure works. Holding their creations together is however the genuine authenticity that can be found in their prints. Having ownership gives this justification which translates well into the politics of the art market because "He had bought it and therefore it was no longer legally, technically part of

²⁹ Susan Sontag 'Regarding the Pain of Others' 44

³⁰ Muller, Priscilla E. "Discerning Goya." Metropolitan Museum Journal, vol. 31, 1996, pp. 175–187. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1512980. Accessed 20.01.21

³¹ Susan Sontag 'Regarding the Pain of Others' 44

some shared cultural inheritance the way museum objects are, but rather his property to dispose of as he wished: to destroy.”³²

In *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* Ai Weiwei himself makes a rare appearance in his artwork to drop what has been found to be a genuine artefact from the Han Dynasty. The appearance of the artist in his work will be expanded in Chapter Two: Authenticity and Politics, but fundamentally, the international recognition of the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei makes their work both more culturally wide reaching and financially successful. What is captured is both the smashing of an object that holds huge cultural heritage and an age of over two thousand years along with the creation of new artistic significance.³³ What dropping the urn means for Chinese culture is a reflection back to the time of the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao, when an organised destruction of such important cultural objects was forcibly implemented. Traditionally, these urns would have been intricately decorated, stamped with seals of the family member buried and were sometimes stained with colour. They were made of porcelain, and often had a seal coating.³⁴ The urns were included as a vessel for the soul of the dead, called Hunpings, and were placed alongside anything else the deceased needed in the afterlife.³⁵ Contemporary art market specialist Ian Robertson commented that Chinese artists have looked at their ancient past as a way to “intellectually and emotionally disengage from the present,” and I would argue that this can be seen in direct relation to Ai Weiwei’s

³² Art and Destruction Jennifer Walden - Chapter 2 The Artist as Anti-Curator in the Museum by Miranda Stearn 39

³³ Charles Merewether ‘Ai Weiwei: Works, Beijing 1993-2003’ Timezone Publishers, and Ai Weiwei 66

³⁴ I say of course, this period of time became the golden age because China became such a worldwide commodity. China from China also became porcelain from China, they mean the same thing.

³⁵ China Online Museum ‘New Discoveries from China’s Han Dynasty’ February 2017. Accessed 15/02/21 <https://www.comuseum.com/blog/2017/02/17/tomb-treasures-new-discoveries-from-chinas-han-dynasty/>

Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn. The use of the urn is an immediate nod to the cultural past of the country, both from its time of existence but more so in its treatment of this very culture under Chairman Mao. The culture of treating art as fragile and untouchable is reversed in a way that engages with direct conversation and intellectually stimulates political problems of the contemporary time, as well as the past. Ai Weiwei made and sold only eight copies of this triptych, which contrasts to the fact that it is a photograph that can be accessed worldwide online. Using photography makes the work of art feel separated from the acts of destruction that occurred under Mao because of the accountability of capturing the moment and makes this work of art more of destruction in protest to restart political conversation, rather than destruction to end a cultural existence.

By restricting authentic creations by the artist himself, Ai Weiwei created a sense of inaccessibility that directly impacted the worth of his work on the contemporary art market. At the time when these pieces were created, Ai Weiwei was at the very beginning of his artistic career. There was less demand for his work because his fame as an artist was not yet renowned as it is today.³⁶ Ai Weiwei commented that now looking back at the time of *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* he was planting seeds of creativity before his real accomplishments came to light.³⁷ The power of his humanitarian works and writing were more significant to him than these artistic productions. At this point, he was known for his participation in humanitarian rebellion against the repressive, and especially watchful, political ruling system in China. When returning to China in 1994 after twelve years in the United States, Ai Weiwei found many

³⁶ Anthony Downey 'The Politics of Shame, Ai Weiwei in Conversation with Anthony Downey' *The Large Glass*, No.25/26 Third Text, 2018. 29

³⁷ Ibid.

improvements in his home country. Roads had been fixed and buildings had been rebuilt to look advanced and modern. However, many things had not improved. Ai Weiwei commented that there was still a one-party system and the judicial system and media belonged to the army.³⁸ It was in this environment that Ai Weiwei made his *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*. Although powerful in the political control, China's set rules regarding freedom of speech and discussion was never as powerful as the corruption the people faced.³⁹

A summary of the Readymade

In order to understand the destruction of the artworks discussed here even more clearly, the conceptual explanation of a readymade can be helpful. This is especially true of Ai Weiwei's triptych. He himself labelled his work a 'cultural readymade', referring to the use of the urn(s) he purchased himself and then dropped in an act that follows a cultural re-do, just as Chairman Mao inflicted.⁴⁰ Ai Weiwei writes, "my work is always a readymade. It could be cultural, political, or social, and also it could be art - to make people re-look at what we have done, its original position, to create new possibilities."⁴¹

The term readymade was first used by Marcel Duchamp to describe art made from found or manufactured objects.⁴² A found object is something an artist finds (or in some cases buys) that he or she saves with intention of using it in an artistic piece.⁴³ This idea is used in Ai Weiwei's work, one of his main influences being Duchamp himself, to engage with both the

³⁸ Downey, 'The Politics of Shame' 32

³⁹ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 10

⁴⁰ Guggenheim Bilbao 'Ai Weiwei, Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn: Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World' Accessed 09/03/21 <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/learn/schools/teachers-guides/ai-weiwei-dropping-han-dynasty-urn-1995>

⁴¹ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 99

⁴² Blotkamp, Mondrian, Fasting, Mondrian, Piet, and Fasting, Barbara Potter. Mondrian : The Art of Destruction. Paperback ed. London: Reaktion Books, 2001 135

⁴³ Ibid.

cultural and financial value of the specific urn. As an emblem for Chinese history, the Han Dynasty urn combines in representation not only the horrors of destruction during the reign of the Cultural Revolution, but also the historical necessity of the creation of porcelain as a material. For the Chapman brothers, their use of a readymade comes from their taking of the Goya print that was already in existence. This makes their work of destruction somehow even more violent, there is a sense of authority for the Chapman brothers in destroying a found object that already had such high cultural value. Fundamentally, the conversation around destruction, aura and authenticity in these works of art will be expanded in this thesis to focus attention on the power of destruction connected to humour as what retains aura and therefore authenticity in the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei's works, as well as helping their specific pieces of art to create such an impact on the art markets.

Humour

Alongside destruction, this thesis will look to humour for its management of fear and shock as a reaction to works of art. As a definition, humour is something that initiates laughter, but this consequently makes humour differ from person to person. If therefore "humour is inspired by gaps, the distance between codes, social conventions and preconceived ideas. In this sense, humour is always transgressive. No wonder humour is strongly featured in art today, seeing as contemporary art has made transgression one of its core objectives."⁴⁴ This will assist in looking at both the Chapman brothers' and Ai Weiwei's work because of the shock factor involved in their destruction. The meaning of both found objects and humour in regard to what the artists destroy will be considered. Taking objects that exist already means a conversation is already in

⁴⁴ Artsper Magazine 'Humour in Modern and Contemporary Art' September 2015 Accessed 19/04/21 <https://blog.artsper.com/en/get-inspired/contemporary-art-humour/>

practice, so Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers actually have the freedom to further a conversation that has already been started. Humour is subjective when it comes to its representation in art.⁴⁵ However it can be argued that in reaction to shock or discomfort, humour is a relatively common emotion, and creating lightness in place of the realness of destruction creates distance between ourselves and these fears.⁴⁶

This thesis will argue that Ai Weiwei creates a sense of humour in his *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* with his inclusion of himself in the photographs. There is humour in his attitude towards officials, the black and white, face on images of his face are perfect mugshots, if by coincidence or not. There is something humorous in his slightly unkempt hair and unbothered expression.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in a lack of awareness of how to react to this work, (is it shock, sadness, sympathy, distaste, disbelief, horror?), humour takes over. It is a reaction of feeling uncomfortable, a way to ease the tension between the multitude of emotions that pile in.⁴⁸ Humour here from one viewpoint is seen as a reaction from the perceiver rather than trying to be humorous in the works of art themselves.

As one of the first artists of his time to create depiction of war from the side of the losing army, Goya used his creative free reign to dramatize the horrors he witnessed. Humour in the prints of Goya is something we are able to see today with distance from the Peninsular War. The audacity of what Goya created is shocking, even today, and this blatant pain and torture that Goya depicts is often met with a feeling of not knowing how to respond. This is then highlighted

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ David Pilling 'Lunch with the FT: Ai Weiwei' 2010. Accessed 24.02.21
<https://www.ft.com/content/f04810fc-4e62-11df-b48d-00144feab49a>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

in the Chapmans' work by the inclusion of the image from the colouring in book, something typically made for a child's entertainment. As the childish part of this drawing over a print, the colouring in outline of cats in a bath tub has different connotations. The fact that cats typically hate water is a start, and the notion that children are given outlines to, to some extent, destroy, all create a stage for humour. Using an outline from a colouring in book is interesting furthermore because it invites the viewer into the mindset of the possibility to add their own layer to the Goya etching.

Aura and the Contemporary English Art Market

Furthermore, is authenticity in line with finding success in the contemporary art market? This connects to the second part of Benjamin's idea about aura, "since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former too, is jeopardized by reproduction."⁴⁹ To answer this, this dissertation will consider why these artists delved to the art market and why they have both been impactful in their different attitudes. This will be furthered by seeing how the art market accepts such different perspectives, and how the consumer has changed through the development of contemporary art over the past few years. Despite this, the influence has come more in the form of social media, which provokes a need for artists to create something so unique that it impresses a new generation of people who see thousands of creative outputs every single day. This thesis looks at the idea that the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei only seem to benefit from this globalisation, the destruction and humour allow for the power of their statement works of art to travel so digitally. The need for such dramatic, eye catching and impressive art has therefore altered the art market for Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers,

⁴⁹ Benjamin, 13

and this is where we find both the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei fully embracing and engaging with the power of the mass media.

Chapter 1 Visual Analysis

To grasp aspects of aura, destruction, humour and the politics of these terms combined, this chapter will analyse each work of art thoroughly. Each work of art has two layers, the Chapman brothers use a Goya print as the canvas of their work, and Ai Weiwei uses a Han dynasty as his focus point. Furthermore, both works of art have taken Art of Destruction to a meaning of continued conversation, and therefore in destruction there has been an activation of discussion over how art has such an important political voice.

Jake and Dinos Chapman *Gigantic Fun Series*, etching 79/81, 2000

Drypoint with Ink under marker pen

Knowledge of the Peninsular War is the first point of entry in understanding this particular piece by the Chapman brothers because of the way in which Goya represented the moment in history. The war took place as part of the Napoleonic wars from 1808 to 1814, with the dismantling of French power by the British, Spanish and Portuguese.⁵⁰ The Peninsular War devastated the social and economic lives of the everyday Spanish citizens. Their dedication to this struggle cost millions of lives, exasperated further when their almost success was thrown in their face by the new, unexpected, King Ferdinand II took power.⁵¹ In the last 17 prints of his 83 print series, Goya depicts the point at which Spanish citizens were giving up the fight in their own country after getting close to success.

⁵⁰ Then And Now 'Spain. The Peninsular War 1808-14' Accessed 29/03/21
<https://www.spainthenandnow.com/spanish-history/the-peninsular-war-1808-14>

⁵¹ Parkwest Gallery 'A Closer Look at Francisco Goya's 'Disasters of War' (Los Desastres de la Guerra), 2019. Accessed 09/04/21 <https://www.parkwestgallery.com/francisco-goya-disasters-of-war/>

The base of this work of art is Goya's Plate number 39, *Disasters of War (Los Desastres de La Guerra)*: 'An heroic feat! With dead men!' (*Grande hazaña! Con muertos!*) from 1810 (published in 1863) it makes this piece particularly unique as one of Goya's most famous pieces.⁵² (Fig. 5.) Important to note here is the lack of identity or even nationality Goya places on the figures depicted in this plate. This remains a theme in Goya's works, he makes a comment on the universality of events that have taken place. Choosing this particular plate was done because of its recognisability both in the oeuvre of Goya but also in the work of the Chapman brothers. This print by Goya has been previously used by the brothers in both life sized and miniature three dimensional forms, for example their *Great Deeds Against the Dead* 1994, the same thing, only smaller, or the same thing but a long way away 2005-6. (Fig. 6.) The position of this particular representation for the brothers therefore holds importance, because of the recognition in it of a sort of summary of the many depictions of the Peninsular War Goya depicted.

Using ink on drypoint that has been etched on immediately causes a harshness to this work. Etching 79 of *Gigantic Fun* takes layers of horror and almost totally camouflages them with a sense of childish humour. For example, the oval shaped face of a cat on the right, simply outlined in a black marker means we can see the grey-brown of the paper this drawing is on, along with a mention of the intricate etching of a tree that has been overlapped just below the nose of the animal. The face of this cat is the clearest part of the work, everything else is intertwined, overlapping and disjointed. Seeing the face of this cat draws the eye down to the bathtub it sits in, and within a split second the viewer is immersed in the strange vulgarity that

⁵² Art Documentaries 'Jake and Dinos Chapman - What do artists do all day?' 2014. Accessed 22/01/21 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_8iOGZR5W8

is the centre of the image. Three other cats sit in the bathtub, each smaller, than the first and depicted in a simple outline but with slightly different body positions and varying eye directions. What sits directly underneath this childish, family orientated depiction, then this horrific depiction of defeat. The hanging head of the figure just off centre to the right engulfs this overwhelming pain of struggle to failure. These etchings were created with drypoint and etching, using these techniques to create shades of light and dark that nuanced the horrific scenes of what he was witnessing.⁵³ To further the above discussion of humour, the childish nature of this etching from *Gigantic Fun* plate 79 does bring to light the humour of a children's colouring book. Jake Chapman calls the Goya's in general "very expensive colouring books".⁵⁴ To be clear, finding the exact colouring book used by the Chapman brothers for their works of art has not been wholly successful. Not finding an exact source however does add to the freedom and personalisation of the drawings over the print, and this freedom could even be seen in the humour that the Chapman's use in putting cats in water, a typically juxtaposing incident.

This print depicts a severed tree with several branches reaching out in broken disarray. On the furthest left of the print, an area least covered by the Chapman brothers overlay, is a hand and a forearm, attached to a branch by its fingernails. Almost directly above this is a human head, impaled on a twig that stands erect from the same branch. Lower down this branch becomes more obscured by cat figures, but the armless and headless torso of a man hangs upside down using his knees to cling on for balance. All three figures have been dismembered in different ways. Coming to the centre of the image, the full body of a man is tied to the trunk of the tree,

⁵³ Christine Zappella 'Goya, And there's nothing to be done (from the Disasters of War)' Accessed 29/03/21 <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/late-europe-and-america/enlightenment-revolution/a/goya-disasters-of-war>

⁵⁴ Art Documentaries '1/2 Jake and Dinos Chapman -What do Artists Do All Day?' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_8iOGZR5W8 Accessed 19/04/21 Short Film.

his head dropped, arms wound around and tied at the back. His feet bound together and tied at the base, a sort of replication of a crucifixion. His torso has been directly overlaid with the face of a young kitten.⁵⁵ There is direct juxtaposition of humiliating and extreme death with youth and playfulness. Finally, and heavily obscured, is the body of a man with his head and shoulders on the floor, and his legs heaved up to rest high up on the tree trunk. His hands sit under the feet of the central figure, and his feet appear to be bound along with his companions' hands. This representation of his death has been obscured by the claw-foot of the bathtub. Again, it feels as if there was purpose behind this placement. The head and body of the deceased man has been etched onto the paper in a way that appears to show him keeping the tree from toppling over. Without his body there is no balance or stability to the crucifix the other figures hang from. A bath claw is the same thing, without it the rounded corners of the semi-circular bath would have no stability, it would become a boat flailing around unsupported. Both the head of the man, and the bath claw are supporting what they are attached to, both have one and the same purpose.

Running through this thesis so far has been the aspect of humour that can be found in the works of art described. Humour as a defence mechanism towards confusion of emotion has been made relevant in both works of art. For the Chapman brothers, humour can be found in this piece in the droplets of water that fall from the top of the image frame. As if from a shower head, these droplets not only fill the bathtub for its happy occupants, but also act as a metaphor for the defacing of Goya's print. Getting an ink etching wet would be comparable to

⁵⁵ Christopher Turner 'I'd like to have stepped on Goya's toes, shouted in his ears and punched him in the face' 2006 Tate Publications Accessed 06/01/21 <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/id-have-stepped-on-goyas-toes-shouted-his-ears-and-punched-him-face>

completely starting again. The audacity and boldness of these droplets of water are then enhanced by a mismatch of puddles and droplets that fall from and around the overflowing bathtub. These puddles, typical as we can see now of the Chapman brothers, have direct meanings. There are four puddles, each of which sit below or around the four victims. The puddles have two purposes, they are the water spilling from the overflowing bathtub, and they are the blood pooling from the deceased.

To look further into the use of the cats in this work, it is first relevant to note that cats are known to despise water. In etching 79 of the series *Gigantic Fun* the print has been overlaid with a picture taken from a child's colouring book featuring some malevolent-looking cats in a bath.⁵⁶ Using what appears to be a common drawing from a children's book creates unity in the eyes of the viewer. However, we are unable to find where the specific drawings come from. The entire series of *Gigantic Fun* use different sketches in the same style, but their original source is unknown. However, there is relatability and nostalgia in the use of such a typical image that juxtaposes directly with the horrors depicted in Goya's print. Choosing a sketch normal in its existence of childhood plays directly into the challenges the Chapman brothers call of the fear obsession in the art markets.

The Chapmans' series of sketching over Goya prints employ similar tactics to make comically gruesome hybrids from originally saccharine imagery combined with human genitalia. These works play with notions humour through "soppy images of pussycats, evidence of the depths of banality to which culture has plummeted, are lampooned as facile by the various mutations

⁵⁶ Christopher Turner, 'I'd like to have stepped on Goya's toes, shouted in his ears and punched him in the face' 2006 <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/id-have-stepped-on-goyas-toes-shouted-his-ears-and-punched-him-face>

performed on them and through titles that employ clichéd sexual terms and lewd innuendos.”⁵⁷ Using a children’s colouring in book image over the extreme imagery that Goya created came with the art of the Chapman brothers who, as Nicola Brown comments “systematically defaced them, adding clown faces, Mickey Mouse heads, swastikas, gas masks and insect eyes to Goya’s figures.” (Fig. 15.)⁵⁸ Here more clearly, the use of humour in conversation with destruction is apparent. This can be made clear because of the way in which Benjamin writes that the removal of importance of authenticity can create political art. In the space of a lack of authenticity there is more ease, some would argue, to create art that involves politics in a conversation with humour. The Chapman brothers embrace this conversation starter with more importance than the idea of destruction.

In terms of the oeuvres of the artists, the Chapman brothers, they were already established artists by 2000, this series was just another one added to their oeuvre. More recently their work has become more figurative and presented in installation form, (*Sum of All Evil* 2013) but at the time of the Gigantic Fun series today they lie in similar places in regards to fame, there is a knowledge of these artists that is similar to each other (Fig. 16). In contrast, 1995 for Ai Weiwei was a time of just the beginning of his artistic career. By this time, he had already begun his work as a humanist and activist against the powers that be, but his role as an artist had not yet been thoroughly explored and was not even referred to as such by Ai Weiwei.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Tate Gallery, Liverpool ‘Jake and Dinos Chapman: Room 1’ <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/jake-and-dinos-chapman/jake-and-dinos-chapman-room-1>

⁵⁸ Nicola Brown ‘Ultimate ugly: Jake and Dinos Chapman’s Disasters of War and the theology of ugliness’ 430

⁵⁹ Anthony Downey ‘The Politics of Shame, Ai Weiwei in Conversation with Anthony Downey’ *The Large Glass*, No.25/26 Third Text, 2018. 29

Ai Weiwei *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* 1994

Triptych of black and white photographs

Series of eight

Ai Weiwei (1957-) is a contemporary artist born in Beijing to the famous poet and artist Ai Qing. Banished to Xinjiang for twenty years due to his father's artistic endeavours, Ai Weiwei's childhood and memory of life under Chairman Mao Zedong was far from pleasant. Mao as the Chairman of the Communist Party of China, along with his Red Guards, inflicted a period of rule from 1943 to 1976 which included the Chinese Cultural Revolution.⁶⁰ In the goal to destroy all things that reminded the people of the past, one object to be almost totally destroyed were urns from the Han Dynasty period which was a 400 year period ruled over by twenty-nine different emperors, and today is seen as the first golden era of Chinese history. This period of time has become known to have been the time where the culture of China really cemented itself, in its "arbitrary, chaotic, uncertain and changeable elements," there was the feeling that China could get back on its feet under all circumstances.⁶¹

A set of three black and white photographs, Ai Weiwei's *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* is a self-portrait of the artist who appears in the same pose in each image. The photographs are a combination of ancient material and an act of destruction which reference the as of yet unclaimed horrors of the 1966-1969 cultural revolution.⁶² Ai Weiwei stands facing the viewer with his back to a brick wall, setting a very industrial, monotone scene. The wall behind Ai

⁶⁰ Tom Phillips 'Cultural Revolution' The Guardian, 2016 Accessed 03/12/20
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>

⁶¹ Roger Conover 'Ai Weiwei's Blog' Writings, Interviews, and Digital Rants 2006-2009
Edited and translated by Lee Ambrozy The MIT Writing Art series, 15

⁶² Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 14

Weiwei is crumbled in its array of bricks, and is most likely the wall of his Berlin studio.⁶³ These aged bricks stop at Ai Weiwei's knee height where they are replaced with a smooth surface, creating this area of simplicity where the dramatics of the dropping of the urn takes place. Bricks once again start under the feet of Ai Weiwei, intermixed with two circles, one to the left and one to the right. This is reminiscent of Rembrandt van Rijn's (1606-1669) *Self Portrait with Circles* in a similar way to the idea that this is an artist's studio with many projects happening at one time (Fig. 7.). These circles look to be similar to manholes or lids of drain pipes, and their industrial nature adds to the harshness of the urns falling on both the concrete floor and also the metallic lids. Ai Weiwei is dressed in oversized clothing and his unkempt hair frames his emotionless face. On his body, his hands are the only thing that move in the series of three photographs.

What takes centre focus in this image is an urn, that Ai Weiwei holds, then releases, before it smashes on the floor at his feet. Thanks to the title of the work, we are informed that this is an urn from the Han Dynasty. Without knowing anything about this time period or the value of an urn during this time, it can be automatically assumed this urn is an ancient relic from thousands of years ago. Even from the perspective of someone from a different culture and with different traditions, the simple fact of the age of the urn that breaks is enough to appeal to all different cultures. It is important because it wouldn't have the same meaning even though we would be able to make exactly the same urn today again and you could not see any differences between the urns. This specific urn however was from roughly 206 BE to 220 AD and holds a huge amount of Chinese history. In the first image of the triptych, Ai Weiwei holds the vase lightly

⁶³ <https://www.frameweb.com/article/why-artist-ai-weiwei-doesnt-believe-in-having-a-personal-legacy>

between his two fingers. Even in this first image there is a sense of the delicacy of both the urn, and the situation. Ai Weiwei is holding such a precious antique in the balance of his fingertips. This delicacy is a reminder of the fragility of the ancient Han dynasty culture that once existed. In a way, it is also a more general reference to the fragility of any culture. The value of material possessions in a culture hold such importance, even Benjamin describes this in his understanding of aura. The second image shows Ai Weiwei, with no change in his stance or facial expression, but with his hands further apart, and with no urn between them. The difference with the first image of this sequence is, of course, that the urn is floating in the air, at the level of Ai's knee, caught in the moment before gravity robs it of its wholeness.

This is the power of photography because it captures a held breath. It makes the dropping of the urn purposeful rather than accidental, creating a direct connection back to Chairman Mao. The final image remains the same as the two that came before it, the only difference being the shattered urn at Ai Weiwei's feet. The moment of impact has not been captured in this image, rather the shattered vase remains scattered on the floor. As viewers we witness destruction, but we are not present in the destruction or in the object that has been destroyed. Something unique to Ai Weiwei's triptych compared to the Chapman brothers piece is the way more than one moment in time has been captured. Taking three photographs means at the viewer we are witness to a series of events in time, the triptych has become a sort of tripartite documentation.⁶⁴ There is a movement captured in a way that cannot be done by a painting or a print. The development over time adds more to the destruction of the physical act of dropping the urn. Ai Weiwei uses photography to capture three still moments in the motion of

⁶⁴ Phillips Auction House, 'Ai Weiwei - Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn, Lot number 109' Accessed 15/12/20 <https://www.phillips.com/detail/ai-weiwei/UK010708/109>

dropping an object. His use of black and white photography juxtaposes the ancient urn that is within the photos.⁶⁵ Digital technology for Ai Weiwei became the most important way to share his artistic, and political, creations because of his time spent without a passport.⁶⁶ Not being able to exhibit in other countries for this reason, and also not being allowed to exhibition in China, Ai Weiwei's works of art were being seen by the world only through digital reproductions.

Conclusively, Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers use artistic techniques of destruction that do not eradicate their ready-made's, but instead create damage to such an extent that conversation and debate is initiated. The reproducibility of both works challenges Benjamin's notions of aura, and therefore authenticity, because of this reproduction, however arguably, the authenticity of both works remains steady and prominent because a new conversation starts with a new definition of authenticity. For Ai Weiwei, the authenticity of his works comes with the inclusion of himself in the triptychs. As a photograph and therefore one of the easiest forms of art to reproduce, the inclusion of Ai Weiwei ensures and retains this authenticity. Ai Weiwei puts himself in the position as the destructor, and creating this ownership and sense of belonging authorises his actions in a way that creates debate over the brutality of destroying an urn of such prestige. For the Chapman brothers, they destroy to an even lesser degree, but rather add a layer to the Goya print that lets the original etching still show through. Their destruction is additional rather than removal which enhances this idea of building on and continuing a political conversation.

⁶⁵ For both works of art, the full visual analysis took place in Chapter One

⁶⁶ Gereon Sievernich, 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 10

Chapter 2 Authenticity and Ownership

The consistency, value and historic nature of ideas surrounding authenticity will lead this chapter to connect authenticity to politics in relation to both the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei's works of art. When using the word authentic, Benjamin's definition seems most relevant. As a reminder at this part of the thesis, Benjamin writes that authentic art has presence in time and space that is unique to its creation, and when or if this piece of art is reproduced, this authenticity and aura is lost.⁶⁷

Displaying Problematic Art

To understand the politics behind displaying art that causes problematic discussions, this thesis will use a statement from Michel Foucault on how thought is what really forms a piece of art. Foucault's reading in regard to freedom and power will be looked at both in the conversation ignited by specific artworks, and how this power is translated onto both global art markets, and digital technologies. He writes, "a problematization does not mean the representation of a pre-existent object nor the creation through discourse of an object that did not exist. It is the ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought"⁶⁸ This quote gives access to understanding the use of both the urn and the Goya print because of the creation of connotation around either object by the artist. Foucault's quote furthermore allows for the intervention of humour because of this battle between what is true and what is false in both authenticity and fundamentally in destruction. The understanding that the destruction of these

⁶⁷ Benjamin, 21

⁶⁸ Lucy Steeds, 'An Anthology of Contemporary Art' 132

objects, the urn and the print by Goya, are more about conversation, follow these discursive and non-discursive thoughts.

Not only does this bring forward uncomfortable replays of the past, but thanks to the Chapman brothers there is a sense of uncomfortableness in our future and how we will take such an important history forward.⁶⁹ This can be closely related to art. The layer that is photography or the drawing of cats in a bathtub act as the scar tissue, but the wounds of the past remain. The power of the Chapman brothers work to reignite both fear from the crimes against humanity during the Peninsular whilst using mocking faces of childlike animals instigates this remnant of a historical wound. When turning back to Foucault's statement, the Chapman brothers work can be looked at in regards to precisely how they play with truth and falsity managing what political statement they provide. The rethinking and reimagining of such a horrific moment in history brings attention to how we should shape the future. This so-called destructive art had kept intact its aura and authenticity because of this ability to spark such debate, and the implications of humour only increase this freedom of conversation.

A link therefore exists between politics and aesthetics because of the importance of the situation in which the work of art has been created. Not only this, but when the image is then seen by the viewer in the contemporary setting, subconscious leanings become involved. Benjamin comments that "politics appears to be inconceivable without politicization," a remark that leaves aesthetics vulnerable to this in-pure form of politics.⁷⁰ There is therefore

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Peter Fenves, 'On the Aestheticizing of the Political' From 'Water Benjamin and Art' 68

fundamentally a connection between aesthetics and politics, even if authenticity is removed to allow space for something aesthetic. Even more remarkably, as theorist Peter Fenves writes, “politics resembles the theory of perception called ‘aesthetics’ under the condition of auratic decline.”⁷¹ This adds a new frame in which to understand the connection between aura and the depletion of it under aesthetics hidden within politics.

Furthermore, Benjamin’s theories of photographs expands even further with an extension of the beginning quote used in this essay; “from a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense.”⁷² Here there is a further understanding of Ai Weiwei’s creations, especially with his use of eight copies of his triptych. Authenticity can be found in Ai Weiwei’s art because he tends to be straightforward in works such as *Trace* from 2014 or *Remembering* from 2009 (Figs. 7, 8). These examples demonstrate the honesty of representing destruction that has been taking place in contemporary Chinese history. Ai Weiwei looks at true life events that occur around him and transforms them into pieces of art that exude this honesty. In the contemporary world where igniting fear and shock is used to gain traction in the art world, Ai Weiwei uses something that holds contemporary worldly concern. This then directly links to Benjamin’s ideas because Ai Weiwei rewrites how a history is being told, but in a very present and modern way. Looking therefore at Ai Weiwei’s case study for this essay, we can see how the struggle and destructive qualities of culture under Chairman Mao is being reproduced in a way that refreshes the memory of destruction in a contemporary, and therefore more triggering way. Ai Weiwei fulfils the three steps, action, object and consequence by creating art that comments on actions

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 26

(mostly crimes against the Chinese people, in the case of *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* it was the destruction of culture under Chairman Mao) of the past, representing them in objects (the urn) and then subsequently using the art market for consequence.

Crucial to the comparison for the Chapman brothers is the question of the authenticity of the Goya prints they bought and used.⁷³ Therefore can it be argued that this gives more to editing and fundamentally destroying the Goya prints? After all, prints are inherently multiple.⁷⁴ On this point however, each individual print is totally unique. The Goya's for example are original, but a copy. They are not the etching Goya made, but they are the only (original) prints made. As there is only one original copy made of the *Disaster of War* prints edited over by the brothers there is no possible way to duplicate what has been created. The Chapman brothers were able to make their violent point of destruction by using the original prints of Goya. But they avoided being blamed for the total destruction of Goya's series all together because these plates still existed.⁷⁵ Jonathan Jones from the Guardian surmises this well, "the Chapman's have remade Goya's masterpiece for a century which has rediscovered evil. And I have fallen into their trap."⁷⁶ The brothers worked around the true authentic pieces (i.e., not permanently damaging the etching's Goya made) of art whilst still generating enough shock to really cause a reaction. The Chapman brothers took the actions of crimes against humanity in the Peninsular War and used the object of depiction from Goya, creating a consequence of awareness and acknowledgment on the art market. There is also a connection here therefore

⁷³ K.E. Gover 'Are All Multiples the Same? The Problematic Nature of the Limited Edition.' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, 2015. 70 Accessed 11/04/21.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43283317>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 78

⁷⁶ K.E. Gover, 'Are All Multiples the Same?' 80

to the lack of importance placed on authenticity. For the brothers, the engagement with political conversation through destruction and humour is what carries their works of art to the art market, rather than the authentic nature of their overdrawing's. Looking at Benjamin's discussion of photography can also to some extent be transferred onto the drawing created by the brothers. For the brothers this series of works of art was about creating something new and initiating a dialogue therefore with authenticities of both Goya and themselves.

Ownership and Authenticity

To further explore authenticity and politics, this chapter will go on to understand briefly the concept of fakes in Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers art. In the case of the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei, both works of art that were destroyed were owned by the respected artists.

To understand the issue of ownership in the Chapman's work, Art Historian Matt Shinn commented "the question here is about the ownership of cultural property, about what money does and does not entitle you to do. Because they have a legal title to it, the Chapmans are not answerable, in the way that a vandal would be, for their destruction of a small piece of Spanish and world heritage."⁷⁷ This is furthered by the idea that the Chapman brothers themselves do not call their act destructive or vandalist. Furthermore, we can look at Foucault's comments on the freedom that comes with power, and look at how the freedom of ownership is really what gives the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei freedom to create productively.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Shinn, Matt 'Blam! Pow! Splat!' 6 November 2003 The Guardian Accessed 04/02/21
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2003/nov/06/art>

⁷⁸ Laura Hegehold 'Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault' Penn State Press, 1st November 2010 236

There is an argument that Ai Weiwei used a replica urn in his triptych. According to Karen Smith in her survey of the artist's work in 2009, Ai Weiwei bought two and dropped two urns, which were then worth a few thousand dollars each.⁷⁹ Not only this, Smith also writes that two urns were scarified in the creating of the triptych because of the failure of the photographer to capture the exact moments of the urn falling.⁸⁰ Ai Weiwei is authentic as himself, but the smashed porcelain on the ground holds very little financial and potentially cultural value.

Value is a key term when looking at authenticity. Financially, this urn used in *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* as a fake is worth very little. But its cultural value is high because Ai Weiwei is still mimicking Chairman Mao in his 'destruction to renew' policy. Many copies were made in almost exact replicas in factories across China and the use of photography distances the urn and its potential fakery from the viewer.⁸¹ There have been thousands of urns copied almost exactly by different artists across China and the world, and this could be one of them. Thanks to the photograph and lack of access to the shattered remains of the vase, these theories can be neither proven nor disproven.⁸² As a further point to raise, it has been discussed by that Ai Weiwei dropped two of these urns.⁸³ If the urn really was true, would Ai Weiwei really have

⁷⁹ Smith, Karen and van der Zijpp, Sue-An 'Ai Weiwei Groninger Museums' NAI publishers, Rotterdam Texts 14

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 38

⁸² There has been much research into the realness of the urn Ai used by professional classifiers. To fully get into either argument is too extensive for this essay – but many have said it is due to the provenance of Ai Weiwei in the art world and his dedication to making an impact on the political nature of China, whilst others argued that the urn was dropped early on in his career, so how could he have afforded if not one but two urns. I will leave the decision of realness up to you.

⁸³ Guggenheim Bilbao 'Ai Weiwei, Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn: Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World' Accessed 09/03/21 <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/learn/schools/teachers-guides/ai-weiwei-dropping-han-dynasty-urn-1995>

missed the opportunity to capture the falling of the first urn? Or alternatively, was that done on purpose to demonstrate the carelessness of how the culture of China has been handled? There is also something to be said about Ai Weiwei's later works. Aside from his photography series of *Study of Perspective* 1995 (Fig. 9.), *Dropping an Han Dynasty Urn* goes one further than this series by actually destroying something, rather than using only a symbolic gesture, Ai Weiwei creates art that is present in the viewer's space.⁸⁴ His Coca Cola urn for example was displayed physically and could be examined and thoroughly deciphered and the availability to examine it closely gives a sense of reassurance for its authenticity. Including the possibility of fakery has been done to understand the fundamental purpose of Ai Weiwei's work. It appears almost irrelevant if the urns are real or not. For Ai Weiwei, his aim was to represent how a new culture was created, and his mimicry of Mao therefore becomes the focus of what the photographic triptych shows.

There are reproductions of both the Chapman brother's print and Ai Weiwei's photographs, firstly thanks to social media but also in the case of Ai Weiwei, he made eight copies of his triptych all of which were sold in western auction houses. Here is a further reason to understand the success Ai Weiwei has had in retaining authenticity and aesthetic in his eight copies of his triptych. To sell on such markets requires a certain level of authenticity, demanding this therefore from Ai Weiwei. For the Chapman brothers, they used at least eighty of Goya's prints in their art, but each one does remain unique. Having looked at Ai Weiwei and his potential for fakery, we can look towards the Chapman brothers who most definitely used original prints.

⁸⁴ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 34

The Chapman brothers' works differ from Ai Weiwei's in their ability to prove the legitimacy of their prints. This is because they show, and often sell, the actual prints themselves. In terms of destruction, the Chapman brothers destroy the original print by drawing over the image and sell this very print. But at the same time they are engaging so directly with the Goya print that the ignition of a conversation becomes the forefront of the destructive process. Although as has been explored, aesthetics is not what makes these works of art authentic in either their political or conversational aims, the legitimacy of the Goya print does engage to a more technical and art historical level. In Benjamin's case, the print, and therefore the work of art by the Chapman brothers, in its authenticity is what validates it in the art market when Goya created the print, to today when the Chapman go to sell their altered version.

Political Destruction in regards to fakes and/or ownership

With the destruction of such politically and historically provocative works of art, both examples of art works pursue very different, sometimes almost contradictory intentions. But the political dimensions of both works connect them in terms of authenticity and ownership. For Ai Weiwei, his goal was to make viewers aware of the value we put on objects that hold such strong cultural history. He directly mimics the idea of a refreshing of culture that Chairman Mao inflicted on China from 1959.

A crucial political work of art in Ai Weiwei's oeuvre is his *S.A.C.R.E.D* piece from 2012. (Figs. 10, 11.) This work consists of six identical boxes that stand at shoulder height, each with small glass windows for viewers to peer in. Each box depicts replicas of the places in which Ai Weiwei lived and moved during his period of incarceration by the Chinese government. Quite literally, the

title of the piece refers to the boxes on display, (i) *Supper*, (ii) *Accusers*, (iii) *Cleansing*, (iv) *Ritual*, (v) *Entropy*, and (vi) *Doubt*.⁸⁵ These works were displayed at the Church of Sant'Antonin in Venice where Ai Weiwei created an environment that encapsulated the conflict between freedom and the struggle of beliefs.⁸⁶ This work is included in this thesis because it demonstrates the importance of political commentary for Ai Weiwei. The risks he takes in acting out incarceration strategies publicly are high. Currently if a citizen speaks out against any part of the country's political regime there is an extraordinary power from within that ensures that person vanishes.⁸⁷ Moreover, Weiwei's artwork *S.A.C.R.E.D.* demonstrates true authenticity once again by including himself in the work/ by depicting himself on the artwork. This can also be directly connected to Ai Weiwei's use of humour, which can be seen in the way he mocks the political government by giving them a reason to question his motives. This is what is shared between *S.C.A.R.E.D* and *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*. Unlike Benjamin's comments that aura, and history, that is connected with an artwork is lost when it is duplicated, the spread of both these works by Ai Weiwei do not lose their authenticity with dispersion.

"Art suffers the responsibility of having to have idealistic things to say about the world. People go to galleries expecting work to have something positive to say. Even if your work is shitty and nasty the response is that this shittiness and nastiness should convert somehow into something positive," says Jake. "We've always tried to hard-wire into our work something to make that impossible."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Andrea Chin 'Ai Weiwei's SACRED Depicts Scenes from his Incarceration' May 2013. Accessed 23/04/21 <https://www.designboom.com/art/ai-weiweis-s-a-c-r-e-d-depicts-scenes-from-his-incarceration/>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Laney Zhang 'Limits on Freedom of Expression: China' Library Congress of Law. December 2020. Accessed 23/04/21 <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/freedom-expression/china.php>

⁸⁸ Ibid., 431

The connection of authenticity and ownership to politics has been shown to be attempted by the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei in different ways. But what connects them is their use of destruction. The artists use humour to create works of art that mock respective political and cultural situations under the preface of ownership. But in this similarity they are also different. Ai Weiwei is still endangered by the Chinese communist regime, and the Chapmans are not directly affected by the Spanish war with Napoleon. The art created therefore is creative and explorative in re-seeing past relics. Each print has taken on a different conversation, some with 'join-the-dots' cartoons and some with oversized teddy bears dominating over typically horrific war scenes. This series as a whole is a group of 83 of Goya's prints from *Desastres de la Guerra* (*Disasters of War*). These works have in common the cartoonish/childish overlaid drawing often taken from children's colouring books. Humour is one of the first things noted in these works. Placing such juxtaposition of imagery together creates dialogue that incites fear and shock, and then to humour. On the other hand, Chapman brothers destroyed art to create awareness of the lack of interest placed on historical atrocities of the past. Connections can clearly be found however in their raising of awareness of the impact of the current political systems, both in China and in the Western societies. Ai Weiwei comments on the disruption and control that remains of the political party in China, whilst the Chapman brothers comment on the demands of capitalism and neoliberalism.

Chapter 3

The Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei use the western contemporary market as a volatile way to put the conversations they create on a global stage.

For the Chapman brothers, their *Gigantic Fun* series came a decade after their purchase of the Goya prints.⁸⁹ But by 2000, the brothers had created many of their most known works of art, such as their miniature sculptures for *Desastres de la Guerra (Disasters of War)* in 1993. However, when looking at Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* was one of his first works of art he created after his return from the US only the year before, so his sudden artistic methods of destruction came with less pre-emptiveness.

Chapman brothers and Fame

To delve in further and create this link between oeuvre and art market, this chapter will begin with the brothers to discuss the influence of their fame. Jake and Dinos Chapman both received MFAs from the Royal College of Art in London in 1990, and have since had solo shows in important museums, including the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, the Tate Britain in London, and KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, besides at a number of world-renowned galleries.⁹⁰ In 2003, they were nominated for the Turner Prize and are most known for their Hell Sculptures. These landscapes, one example being *The Sum of All Evil* (Figs. 14, 15.) depict gruesome scenes that include figures with Nazi arm bands next to the figure of McDonald (the owner of the fast food franchise, McDonald's). Not only this, the images of corpses on

⁸⁹ The Art Story "Jake and Dinos Chapman Artworks: British Installation Artists" Accessed 04/04/21 https://www.theartstory.org/artist/chapman-jake-and-dinos/artworks/#pnt_1

⁹⁰ Alyssa Buffenstein "Blain|Southern Gallery Now Represents Jake and Dinos Chapman" Artnet 2017, Accessed 05/03/21 <https://news.artnet.com/market/blain-southern-represents-jake-dinos-chapman-860327>

crucifixes are common alongside skeletal bodies gawking at cartoonish characters that have become part of the McDonald chain. For the Chapman brothers, their aim is to push moral and acceptable boundaries to challenge cultural and historical stereotypes, using surreal humour to question these hegemonic iconographic themes.⁹¹ Combining true historical horror and the capitalist giant that is McDonalds, the Chapman brothers demand a cultural conversation. In their *Gigantic Fun*, this juxtaposition has been repeated, overlaying a comic sketch over Goya's depiction of death. Creating an oeuvre before the Goya prints and claiming that that these past works were not in fact destructive but conversational also allow for the analysis of *Gigantic Fun* to be more than just Art of Destruction because this conversation has been created before. The *Sum of All Evil* depicts such juxtaposed ideas visually and immediately that its impact inflicts shock and a reconsideration of the relationship between such things. Such a complex combination of artworks has meant that the Chapman brothers were already known for their artistic disturbances. Furthermore, creating an oeuvre before their Goya prints and claiming that that these past works were not in fact destructive but conversational give some justification. There is therefore less shock in the Chapman brothers work of destruction because of this build up on oeuvre.

More closely linked to this print from the series *Gigantic Fun* (2000) are the other etchings the Chapman brothers created. Often shown all together, the other etchings range from cartoons over dead civilians to join the dots around skeletons and those impacted on a tree suddenly the stage for a children's band. This specific oeuvre has yet to be sold, but works on paper from the brothers sell for thousands, their *Insult to Injury* collection sold for one hundred thousand

⁹¹ Sarah Kent "Jake and Dinos Chapman: The Sum of All Evil at White Cube" Inhale Magazine 2013, Accessed 04/03/21 <http://inhalemag.com/jake-dinos-chapman-the-sum-of-all-evil-at-white-cube/>

British pounds from Christie's last year.⁹² The Chapman brothers were intent on adding value to the Goya pictures in a way that was expressive and creative. There is a fascination with the ugly and humour in all Chapman brother's work, and they discuss this with the comment that "if there were no beauty, there would be no ugly at all, for the latter exists only as a negation of the former."⁹³ This challenge of beauty can be argued to be what brings in authenticity to the Chapman brother's work.

Etching 79 of *Gigantic Fun* pushes such aesthetic boundaries that demanding this alteration of beauty exercises limitations of even the contemporary art world. A conversation in New York about one of their exhibitions led to a statement from Jake, supported by Dinos, which was as follows, "Art is not the property or possession of the people that make art," Jake Chapman continued. "Art is the conditions of history. Art pre-existed before people make art. Artists are subordinate to art. In many times, art history is described as the stream of individual artists' original works. But that's not true. There is no artwork that gains meaning outside the context of history." He also said, "Art is destructive ... full of hatred and malevolence ... It has been destructive art - not creative art - that overcomes the past." "Always," Dinos added. The brothers using what already exists in the art world creates recognition and sympathy, which is only exasperated by the overlaying of their new additions. There is naturally negative critique when it comes to the specific nature of the Chapman brother's work on the art market. Art critic Rachel Campbell-Johnston comments that the brothers "desecrated" the Goya prints with doodles, and this childishness lacks in aesthetic and honour. She does note that

⁹² Christies "Jake and Dinos Chapman" Christies 2020 Accessed 05.03.21
<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6285903>

⁹³ Nicola Brown 'Ultimate ugly: Jake and Dinos Chapman's Disasters of War and the theology of ugliness' 427

fundamentally, publicity is still gained from the negativity they bring to the Goya's. "Goya's work was evocative because the restraint of the draughtsmanship contrasted with the barbarity of the crimes he depicted. But the Chapman brothers are simplistic. In the interview, they will rope in intellectual henchmen from Nietzsche to the Marquis de Sade to Georges Bataille."⁹⁴

Once again, it is not financial success on the art market that is the brothers' driving force or motivation for creating these works. The art market is used as a demonstration of the negative sides of globalisation and industrialisation. Creating works of destruction that are destructive in their nature that humour erupts disjoints this traditional set of market values.

To be clear *Gigantic Fun* etching 79 has not (yet) been sold, but for the Chapman brothers, the contemporary art market is not only a selling point. It acts as a commodity for the brothers, buying old masters art that they ponder on and edit to their liking.⁹⁵ This comes under the premise of ownership, as mentioned previously, and there is a balance between the Chapman brothers being part of the art market as both collectors and artistic producers and suppliers. It can be seen as something relatively uncommon, yet the authenticity of what they sell can in some instances be argued to have strength incomparable to Ai Weiwei, or artists that do not financially feed the contemporary art market.

The Chapman brothers have been buying and selling their pieces on the western art market for as long as they have been artists.⁹⁶ Their work currently sells for upwards of a million dollars

⁹⁴ Rachel Campbell-Johnston, Art Critic "The brothers grim may win, but only for the X rating" The Times Factavia 29 October 2003 Accessed 15/01/21 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-brothers-grim-may-win-but-only-for-the-x-rating-k6c0n2j3r5p>

⁹⁵ Rendall, 22

⁹⁶ Ibid., 32

per piece, heightening their international fame to levels competing with the most successful contemporary artists today.⁹⁷ According to Ludovic Hunter-Tilney who interviewed Jake and Dinos back in 2013, after the brothers bought a \$310,000 work of art by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, and after Dino's intervention, it was sold for \$1.2m.⁹⁸ This is just one example that demonstrates the wealth that becomes accumulated when the Chapman's (one, or in many cases, both) become involved and edit a work of art. So, their *Gigantic Fun* prints are not all currently available for purchase. However due to their other prints that have sold from both their *Gigantic Fun* collection and others that have been mentioned above the art market can already assume what the brothers will sell for. Authenticity is no longer questioned because of this established oeuvre, and instead the humour of these pieces really comes to light.

Of course, on the other hand we can look at the fact that many of the Chapman brothers' works focus purely on subject matter. Looking, for example, towards their defacing of old master portraits and the way their imagination plays with terrifying both historical and very contemporary threats in Hitler and the KKK (Figs. 14, 15).⁹⁹ The old master portraits titled *One Day You Will No Longer Be Loved* take Victorian portraits which are then disfigured by the Chapman brothers (Fig. 18.). Maybe here we find the Chapman brothers doing both, raising awareness and status of a "lost" artist, and also drawing appreciation for the horrors that were the Peninsular War.

⁹⁷ Ludovic Hunter-Tilney "Lunch with the FT: Jake and Dinos Chapman" Financial Times, November 2013, Accessed 12/04/21 <https://www.ft.com/content/2c364e58-51d9-11e3-adfa-00144feabdc0>

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Matt Shinn 'Blam! Pow! Splat!' 6 November 2003 The Guardian Accessed 04/02/21 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2003/nov/06/art>

Ai Weiwei and his oeuvre in relation to Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn selling on the western art market

The Cultural Revolution sparked an increase in commissioned art, as powerful dictatorships can do, thanks to the need to rewrite and re-culture a nation.^[10] Politically speaking, texts written on Ai Weiwei highlight his fame amongst the West. From his imprisonment in 2011 onwards, he has become even better known for his stance against politics of China. “Ai’s power and influence derive from the fact that his work and his words have become catalysts for international political debates that affect every nation on the planet: freedom of expression, nationalism, economic power, the Internet, the rights of the human being.”¹⁰⁰ This fame has been enhanced by the authentic meaning and belief Ai Weiwei puts in his work. The fame of Ai Weiwei can be summed in a short quote from Gereon Sievernich in his ‘Ai Weiwei Evidence.’ Sievernich writes “Ai Weiwei has become a globally acting artist who uses all means of communication and is therefore present beyond all borders through his virtuoso use of electronic media.”¹⁰¹ Breaking down borders with digital media and technology is encompassed in *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* because of the capturing of more than one moment in time, and this passage of movement subsequently being readily available at the internet’s fingertips. Ai Weiwei’s *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* was made as quite a rarity in comparison to both his subsequent works of art. Before 1995, Ai Weiwei worked on one large scale installation piece, *Still Life*. This work was begun in 1993 and only finished in 2000, but it includes around 4,000 stone axe heads placed meticulously on the floor. Commenting on the handling of Chinese social history, these axe heads date back from

¹⁰⁰ Preece, ‘The Authentic Celebrity Brand’ 618.

¹⁰¹ Gereon Sievernich ‘Ai Weiwei Evidence’ 209

China's Stone Age, around 6000 BC, to the Shang Dynasty (10,000-1100 BC).¹⁰² This work as one example shows the conversational nature of Ai Weiwei's intentions with his art, but it also demonstrates the more controlled notions of the very start of his career. Making his *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* triptych a black and white photograph automatically makes it accessible to all online audiences. Think of the reproducibility of such works through social media, documentations and visual mimicry. Through making a digital work, Ai Weiwei universalised his comments of China's past.

A huge amount of art has been created by Ai Weiwei since his dropping of the urn, and his use of urns in other areas of his artwork have also now become of high regard. A huge part of this furthering of his art has been showing his works in London, for example at the Royal Academy of Arts.¹⁰³ Dipping the same Han Dynasty urns in paint and writing crude logos over their precious surfaces ignites both shock and a consideration of the power of the display of his work. In the same way the Chapman brothers juxtapose such striking topics, Ai Weiwei scrawls the Coca Cola logo over one of the rare urns in his possession, using these ancient materials to achieve the effect of surprise.¹⁰⁴ This defacement demands consideration of capitalism over temperamental and fragile culture, the culture is still there and is still seen, but its whole image and vulnerability has been lost to contemporary politics. Ai Weiwei understands and lives Michel Foucault's notion that freedom is not opposed to power, but that the two are necessarily connected and intersect in the same discourse.¹⁰⁵ All of this can be seen in his work

¹⁰² Harriet Baker "Ai Weiwei: 13 works to know" 2015 Royal Academy, Accessed 08/04/21
<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/ai-weiwei-13-works-to-know>

¹⁰³ Kayser, Christine Vial 'Exhibition Reviews: The Artist as Activist as Artist: Ai Weiwei at the Royal Academy, London, 19 September-13 December 2015' 201

¹⁰⁴ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 13

¹⁰⁵ Ai Weiwei and Anthony Pins 'Ai Weiwei Spatial Matters Art, Architecture and Activism' 32

as an art collaborator, architect, curator, and editor. What Ai Weiwei has achieved is combining this important representation of Chinese antiques with contemporary art. He has done this in a way that creates huge accessibility and awareness.¹⁰⁶

What Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers have in common is their use of the art market for global recognition. It is important to emphasize here that it is not necessarily recognition for themselves, but recognition in terms of disseminating political viewpoints and messages. Thus, the specific selling of the artworks does not represent the ultimate goals of the artists. Nevertheless, the sale of both artworks used in this work has positive consequences in the contemporary art market, commenting on the intricacies of political commentary both the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei make. For the Chapman brothers, these intricacies were intentional. They were continuing this circle of buying, selling and investing in art to revive past styles and embrace change. On the other hand, for Ai Weiwei and his *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, it was a subsequent happening that could not have really been helped. Selling on the art market was successful, but for Ai Weiwei success came with educating many people on the cruelty and destruction of rule under Chairman Mao. The importance for Ai Weiwei, who does not even call himself an artist, is the humanitarian aid he can deliver. This piece in particular can be argued to have been carefully choreographed in its inclusion of Ai Weiwei himself. As such an early work, there is a huge amount of shock factor which was a bold move to come from an artist who did not necessarily (or yet) have the international appeal many contemporary artists hold today.

¹⁰⁶ Gereon Sievernich 'Ai Weiwei Evidence' 13

However, the inclusion of himself in this work emanates back to notions of aura and authenticity. Another bold step in creating this work was the inclusion of his face, which also adds a special layer of authenticity. This is why this work is so true, and it can be argued that part of the success of these eight prints he created comes from his inclusion of himself. To look at it from a different perspective, the selling of eight copies of this work without Ai Weiwei as the intercessor and initiator of the dropping would have created even more space than already is in regards to the authenticity and originality of the urn. Ai Weiwei being part of the artwork means he makes himself accountable for what he is doing. It is as if he has personally signed the work.

Moreover, to understand my argument for Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers, this thesis has found that they are united by their destruction of art but represent it in different ways. In terms of destruction, Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers are destroying other artists' works, rather than their own, moving away from, but explaining the involvement of, art of destruction. The artists are taking their political messages and placing them in art form on pieces of work that embrace war and destruction wholeheartedly.

In conclusion of this section on the positioning of Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers on the western contemporary art market, it can be understood that both the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei are creating new agendas for the works of art. It also has been shown that there is not an economic desire that drives either the brothers or Ai Weiwei. Also highlighted through looking at the respective art markets are the differences in culture between the works of art created. Ai Weiwei creates something that is universal. Yes, he uses an urn that means the most to people of China because it is a part of their specific history, but he uses something old,

recognisable, that gets buried with family members. It is something that is recognisable and definable because of its age. In the case of the Chapman brothers, however, they have not created performance art, but a sketch that is creative in its format of "filling in the lines."

Chapter 4 Politics and the art market

To lead on from Chapter Three, this chapter will look more closely at how politics is linked to the western contemporary art market. Once again, the nature of Benjamin's aesthetic definition comes into play. The conversation created by the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei with their respective works comments on the shift in political attitudes from the past to today. For the Chapman brothers, this refers to the difference between the politics of Spain during the Peninsular War, and for Ai Weiwei it is the difference between the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao and where the politics of the country stands today. Benjamin's idea of authenticity appears here because it can be argued that the powerful destructive nature of the works of art means they retain their aura when spread across the global network. This also comes into play more thoroughly through the concept of humour. The humour in the blankness of Ai Weiwei's face and the use of a cartoon by the Chapmans contains this authentic aura even with the international political spread because they are universal.

The art market is not often impacted by general economic disturbances. One way to understand this has been explained by Masha Golovina, Director of Market Analysis for the company Masterworksio who focuses on democratizing ownership in the world's greatest masterpieces.¹⁰⁷ She writes that art has the unique ability to regulate supply and demand. Such as, when there is a stable market economy art exchanges hands relatively freely and quickly, ranging from the most exclusive art all the way through its own economy. And then, when the markets are more temperamental, owners of elite pieces of art tend to hold on to their pieces as forms of safe financial investment. This along with a relatively regular amount of demand,

¹⁰⁷ Masha Golovina 'What Happens to Art in a Financial Crisis?' Masterworksio 2018
<https://medium.com/@masterworksio/what-happens-to-art-in-a-financial-crisis-2cc9c20451b8>

means the demand for contemporary works with slightly shorter histories rises and those most established remain stable.¹⁰⁸ There has always been a utilitarian view of art, from its position in churches to the “state, arms, individual patronage, nature appreciation, scientific phenomena, anecdote and decoration.”¹⁰⁹ This means that there has always been a general need and demand for art along the huge scale of wanting to demonstrate wealth to supporting a new artist.

Chapman brothers: Politics and the Art Market

For the Chapman brothers, the focus in their work lies with creating a conversation through humour about a past atrocity that no longer is prevalent in the contemporary art market.

The focus for their etching number 79 of the series *Gigantic Fun* lies more in the juxtaposition of very similar art forms. Both Goya and the Chapman brothers used the same surface and both artists used drawings for their work of art. Goya dedicated his experiences into these prints and created them in a time where he was surrounded by the Peninsular War.¹¹⁰ However, for the Chapman brothers, this context has changed, managing to combine two types of destruction, one in the subject matter that is Goya’s print, and the other is the destruction of the art itself.¹¹¹ Furthermore, there is a complete change in why these prints are being shown today. Goya was unable to show his works as a courtly painter because of the threat of violence, but the Chapman brothers have the freedom to not only show these works

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Victoria L. Rodner and Chloe Preece “Painting the Nation: Examining the Intersection Between Politics and the Visual Arts Market in Emerging Economies” *Ephemeral Journal*, 2017, Accessed 04/03/21 130

¹¹⁰ Madison, T. Rendall, “Goya Reclaimed: Contemporary artists” May 2019 <https://uh-ir.tdl.org/handle/10657/4481> 25

¹¹¹ Ibid., 22

today, but also the freedom to add a layer of destructive quality. The Chapman brothers here are not really creating art that is destructive in the traditional sense of Art of Destruction, instead they are creators of new art that in itself is a whole form. Politically speaking, Jake Chapman spoke out against the criticism of vandalism on the Goya works. He commented “I think the question of it being vandalism is actually, technically, incorrect because vandalism is normally schematically destructive when what we did with the Goya pictures was to draw on them very delicately. So, they are more over-drawings than they are acts of vandalism.”¹¹² This term over-drawing in a way unites the brothers with Goya. Jake speaks of the respect they gave the Goya prints, rather than an act of destruction or vandalism the brothers searched for a way to re-see the original work of art. Turning to the more political aspect, the Chapman brothers here take the involvement of industrialisation in their work due to their use of the shock factor. Is it ironic today that in such a technologically developed world the Chapman brothers have to use past events of horrors and then add another layer of shock to create an impact? Rather than matching the contemporary market’s standards of fine art, the brothers initiate the feeling of shock in their work, and are still selling pieces of art for seven or eight figure sums.¹¹³ For the Chapman brothers today, what they create is arguably even more of a disturbing work of art because it depicts such destruction. The conversation they create as artists comes with such freedom because of how destructive their *Gigantic Fun* is. Here furthermore is where to deal with the juxtaposition of destruction and creation of conversation humour plays such an important part.

¹¹² Ibid., 30

¹¹³ Ben Luke ‘Bad boys of art: The Chapman brothers take on the Government’ The Standard Accessed 13/04/21 <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/bad-boys-of-art-the-chapman-brothers-take-on-the-government-6578757.html>

Ai Weiwei: Politics and Art Market

In Ai Weiwei's work, there are different layers created by different means and in different socio-political situations. Ai Weiwei combines art forms that are so different, for example the urn he holds and then releases was created at a totally different cultural time to when the concept of photography was introduced. For Benjamin, the importance of the moment of creation can be analysed to further understand the impact of how authenticity can have an impact.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, 1995 was only a year after Ai Weiwei returned from the United States. At this time, experimental art was taking off in China, there was a post-1989 'China's Now Art' movement which was both nationally and internationally successful.¹¹⁵ Alongside this, there were artistic events that began representing young Chinese artists.

Not only the 1993 Venice Biennale that represented artists such as Wang Youshen and Wang Guangyi, but it was the 1996 Shanghai Biennale that really took off in terms of putting Chinese art on the contemporary art map.¹¹⁶ At this Biennale, famed French art critique Pierre Restany positively commented on the Chinese works, generating a new growth of reputation and influence.¹¹⁷ This new era of contemporary art if slightly behind the Western contemporary art market, is still being heavily controlled by the Chinese government. This restriction can actually be mirrored in the control that Goya faced when creating his original Disasters of War prints.

¹¹⁴ Stephanie H. Tung 'Black, White and Grey: Ai Weiwei in Beijing 1993-1997' A Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art 2017 Accessed 12/04/21. 61. http://yishu-online.com/wp-content/uploads/mm-products/uploads/2017_v16_06__tung_s_p055.pdf

¹¹⁵ Emmanuel Lincot 'Contemporary Chinese Art under Deng Xiaoping' Translated from the French original by Michael Black Accessed 11/04/21

¹¹⁶ Asia Art Archive 'Photographs of Chinese artists and Curators at the 45th Venice Biennale' <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/archive/wang-youshen-archive-photographs-of-chinese-artists-and-curators-at-the-45th-venice-biennale-45>

¹¹⁷ Emmanuel Lincot 'Contemporary Chinese Art under Deng Xiaoping' Translated from the French original by Michael Black Accessed 11/04/21

The stance he took against the Spanish government at the time meant his works did not get printed until after his death, the threat of punishment for treason prevented the criticism Goya presented ever being made public.¹¹⁸ This is then directly linked to Benjamin's idea that political art steps away from aesthetics because, in the case of the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei, the political restraints placed on their original object used (urn and print) become conversational today due to this attitude of conversationalism.¹¹⁹

The huge variety of art that is being created and shown on the art market has consequently meant more artists are pushing the limits of political works. This freedom however is something that Goya did not have. At the time of creation, there was no possibility for him to sell his works due to the angle he took against the political governance of Spain and the way he acted out by mockingly celebrating death in war. This has now completely changed. In the contemporary world the Chapman brothers face criticism for their political statements, but still have the freedom without threat of punishment to express their views, and even further, have the privilege to make money from them.

However, looking at Golovina's words about the art market, it can be stated in relation to Ai Weiwei that he creates art that generates tremendous activity in the art market. But, as the Chapman's do, his work is not a direct commentary. With the humanitarian focus in his work, he aims to highlight the failures/errors of government, further exemplified by the way the art

¹¹⁸ Museum Boijmans 'Goya's Disasters of War' Accessed 12/04/21
<https://www.boijmans.nl/en/collection/in-depth/goya-s-disasters-of-war>

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

is shared.¹²⁰ It can be seen that gaining traction on the contemporary Western art market for Ai Weiwei was of little imperative compared to the Chapman brothers. Whilst all three artists held in commonality of sharing a message through their somewhat humorous destruction, it can be argued that the art market financial success was a political and economic consequence, rather than a necessary step for the conversation of re-seeing culture to be expanded.

Price, authenticity and how humour plays a part in destructive political statements

A new sense of authenticity is coming through with art that is created to enact change or cause political disruption. As Stephen Zepke, a specialist in continental aesthetics and modern and contemporary art observes, since the 1960s, “all artistic practices have had to involve a minimum of conceptual reflection in order to be considered in any way contemporary.”¹²¹ There has been a change in what is seen as authentic in contemporary art because a conversation is required for the pieces to create action. Art today sits alongside so much else aside from the physicality of a work of art. Two art historians, Karen van den Berg and Ursula Pasero, observed that many art studios, including that of Ai Weiwei, “now resemble those of large architectural practices, industrial workshops and corporate advertising agencies.”¹²² This draws on the topic of this chapter, politics and the art market because politics can enhance

¹²⁰ Boris Groys ‘Art Without Market, Art Without Education; Political Economy of Art’ 2013 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60205/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art/>

¹²¹ Victoria L. Rodner and Chloe Preece “Political Art Without Words: Art’s threat of emergence, and its capture within signification and commodification” *Ephemeral Journal*, 2017, Accessed 04/03/21 http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/17-4autonomousartistsanonymous_0.pdf

¹²² Degen ‘Value-Added Art’ Whitechapel book ‘The Market’ 14

and disrupt authenticity, becoming more in depth with the discussion of how this matter interplays with the contemporary art market.¹²³ The emergence of continued conversation from destruction is linked with politics because “this emergence [of politics] does not arise from statements, but from the creation of sensations and affects that move the viewer/participant through the affective, corporeal responses produced in the encounter”¹²⁴

Contemporary art, having been stretched to the opposite side of what the traditional perspective on painting is, now rests on the almost inevitability that it has a political subconscious. This, or often a very obvious political message, can be found in both works of art. Both pieces are interpreting something in a new way, and both create further layers of meaning in their works. By doing this, they create their own sort of politics. The Chapman brothers purchased *Gigantic Fun* at auction for the cost of an estimate of thousands of pounds.¹²⁵ Benjamin comments that authenticity comes from a basis of ritual, i.e. authenticity comes from something who's processes have been thoroughly thought through. In the case of the Chapman brothers and their connection with the art market, their choice of purchasing prints comes at a much lower price point than Goya's paintings. For example, in 1992, when the Chapman brothers were becoming more focused on accumulating Goya works, one of his oil paintings, *Bullfight, Suerte de varas* (1824) (Fig.12.), sold for \$7.1 million to J. Paul Getty.¹²⁶

¹²³ Ian Roberston 'Understanding Art Markets' Routledge 2016 142

¹²⁴ Ephemera Journal 'Political Art Without Works: Art's threat of emergence, and its capture within signification and commodification'
http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/17-4autonomousartistsanonymous_0.pdf

¹²⁵ Randall 34

¹²⁶ Ibid., and footnoted: Gleadell, "Measuring the Goya Market: The Last Old Master's Highs and Lows," Blouin Artinfo. October 31, 2013
<https://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/832408/measuring-the-goya-market-the-last-old-masters-highs-and-lows>.

Whereas the most ever paid for a series of Goya prints sold for was \$360,000 in 2007 in Switzerland.¹²⁷ This relatively cheaper alternative arguably gave the Chapman brothers more freedom when creating their Gigantic Fun series, along with the above mentioned discussion over the real authenticity when talking about prints in the first place.

From a moral point of view, however, it is not justifiable or very questionable to make profit with images of war crimes. However, the Chapman brothers must be credited for drawing attention to Goya as an artist and to the Civil War, and seem to make an excuse for themselves due to the inclinations of humour as mentioned previously. Painting the direct opposite about the war images pulls the meaning out of the comfort of its originality and into attentive focus. As mentioned previously, the political aspects of both works are crucial in determining the representations of authenticity. For this chapter both objects that have been destroyed or defaced, the urn and the Goya print, are what they have been presented to be. This means that their destruction has a greater impact because the pieces themselves, both monetarily and culturally, are of great importance. This is the key, as argued, to linking destruction and the art market. Generating conversation around issues presented in both works of art presupposed benefitting from the political and international nature of these markets. Fundamentally, both works also sit in Walter Benjamin's measurements of value because of their high exhibition value.¹²⁸ The very fact that the triptych and the print can be moved around so easily adds to their authenticity and political presence because it is so easy to show them in different places all over the world. Their accessibility therefore not only engages globally in conversation, but also manages to retain its authenticity.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 34

¹²⁸ Walter Benjamin, 26

Conclusion

The conversation that accompanies the destruction of culturally significant art, as has been shown in this essay, cannot be viewed unilaterally. It therefore has both positive and negative consequences, whereby the importance attributed to the respective consequences must be decided by each individual viewer. This brilliance of creating a conversation with atrocities in the past through humour and destruction creates layers and depth to contemporary Art of Destruction. This freedom of anticipating conversation that is so subjective comes together due to the way in which Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers take a personal perspective on destruction.

Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers in their own ways make an auratic moment of history present and important in the contemporary world because of this furthering of conversation and making destructive art continual, rather than final. Using destruction, the artists repeat actions of the past in a way that is opposite to original intentions. Creating a conversation through destruction not only is a reminder of the different contexts and meanings destruction can have, but it also demonstrates the consequence of bringing readymade art into a contemporary context. This becomes verified with the success of Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers on the contemporary English art markets. As has been written, there was (and is) contemporary demand for these artists, therefore validating their reigniting of authenticity. Furthermore, displaying these past atrocities using destruction in the contemporary sense as a way to grab and hold the attention of the modern-day viewer. The artists have been successful in displaying and reworking past art works because of their very ability to destroy in a way that is both political and provocative. Consequently, the importance of authenticity comes through in combination with Benjamin's concept of aura because of this unbridled truthfulness and banality. The artists have shattered the

expectations of reproducibility by igniting this conversation through humour. The shock of the destruction the Chapman brothers and Ai Weiwei created in their acts of art can show what they really depict politically speaking. However, reigniting objects of such important cultural pasts fundamentally means that, as the viewer, we are prompted to recognise layers of understanding underneath the destruction. Destruction has been used to gain attention, and once this attention has been grasped, through humour the understanding of reigniting past horrors becomes explicit. The politics of both the then, and the now become present inducing even further this dramatic authenticity.

Ai Weiwei and the Chapman brothers take artefacts that not only depict or incorporate the culture of the time then, but that also manipulate these artefacts to suit the contemporary day. There is a connection here to the political viewpoints Benjamin held. He saw the way in which art moved in the world as an outcome of economic structures and forms of production linked directly to art authenticity and aura.¹²⁹ The openness of 'The Age of Reproducibility' has allowed this essay to argue that instead of losing aura after destruction, it has been enhanced. Although it must be said that reproducibility does limit the authenticity of works of art more generally, the destruction of an original print only seems to enhance the original object's aura. Benjamin not only comments on the importance of a thing's essence, he also pauses on the idea of its history. The story and background of a 'thing' is where its authenticity, its politics, its value begins. Here is a similarity between the two works of art that will be studied. Both the Goya print and the Han Dynasty urn come with huge political and social histories that emanate from the works even today, and even when shone under a

¹²⁹ Jens Hoffmann 'The Arcades: Contemporary Art and Walter Benjamin' The Jewish Museum New York, Yale University Press 2017 13

spotlight at a contemporary art auction. The artists use the destruction of these older works of art, to create new art. Destruction can further be defined as a removal of familiarity, of creating something that lacks recognisability. This is connected with the idea that new art comes from the production of sameness, but holds qualities that differ, if even slightly, from its original or presupposed clarity.¹³⁰ Although this thesis agrees with Benjamin's discussions around aura, it also has considered the vast over-reproduction of all things, including artwork, and the positive impact this can actually have. This aura is powerful due to the aggressive messages that come through both types of destruction, and this aura is fundamentally what surpasses the issue of reproduction.

I have argued that the presence of authenticity (with its definition by Benjamin) is what creates acceptance towards two such destructive works of art. For Ai Weiwei, raising a political discussion was his most important goal, and he did this by turning the actions of a dictator into a contemporary way of rethinking the cultural normative. He merged together the atrocities that shaped Chinese cultural history with a subjective and contemporary proclamation of civil rights. For the Chapman brothers, their work is truly personal, taking liberties with the concept of ownership to bring back to life the somewhat neglected prints of Goya. The very simplicity of the cats in the bathtub is what brings to life the intricacies of Goya's print, and this juxtaposition demands the discussion of authenticity. The personal nature of their work is what draws together authenticity with aura, and the additive destruction ignites this conversation. Finally for both works of art, Benjamin's notions of authenticity are so present because of the active conversation that is created through destruction. The additive destruction by the artists is what continues discussions, revealing the power of the Art of Destruction.

¹³⁰ Bobby Matherne 'Art Is The Process of Destruction' 2002 by Bobby Matherne
<http://www.doyletics.com/artpofd.htm>

Illustrations



Figure 1 Jake and Dinos Chapman Gigantic Fun Series Exhibition view from MoMA 2000-2001



Figure 2: *Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes Los Desastres de la Guerra (Disaster of War) (1810-1820)* Exhibition
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Figure 3: Jake and Dinos Chapman *Gigantic Fun* Etching 79/81 2000 37 x 42.3 cm Photo: Stephen White Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London) Credit Jake and Dinos Chapman



Figure 4: Ai Weiwei *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* 1994 Triptych: black and white photograph, Each 148 x 121 cm (58 1/4 x 47 5/8 in. One out of a collection of eight. This particular version was sold by Philips for £115,250



Figure 5: Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *Plate 39 Disasters of War (Los Desastres de La Guerra): 'An heroic feat! With dead men!' (Grande hazaña! Con muertos!)* 1810. Published in 1836



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Figure 8: Ai Weiwei *Trace* 2014 San Francisco at Alcatraz Island Image courtesy Ai Weiwei shown here at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden 2015. Built from Lego bricks by hand.



Figure 9: Ai Weiwei *Remembering* 2009 Photograph courtesy of Ai Weiwei. A sentence uttered by a mother who lost her child in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake spelt out in children's backpacks. More than 80,000 lives disappeared.



Figure 10: Ai Weiwei *Study of Perspective* 1995-2003 Black and white photographs. This image is just one example in front of Piazza San Marco Venice, Italy . Others were taken in front of the White House, the Eiffel Tower and Beijing's Tiananmen Square



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Figure 12: Ai Weiwei One of the boxes created for his series *S.A.C.R.E.D* 2013, a six-part work composed of (i) *Supper*, (ii) *Accusers*, (iii) *Cleansing*, (iv) *Ritual*, (v) *Entropy*, (vi) *Doubt*. The Church of Sant'Antonin in Venice Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.



Figure 13: Jake and Dinos Chapman *Sum of All Evil* 2012/2013 A creation of miniature figures contained in glass viewing boxes, installation view



Figure 14: Jake and Dinos Chapman: *Sum of Evil* 2012/2013 A creation of miniature figures contained in glass viewing boxes, installation view of one scene



Figure 15: Jake and Dinos Chapman *One Day You Will No Longer Be Loved (That it should come to this...)* From a series. 2008 Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.5 cm



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