

# A Merry and Critical Collecting Behavior: Why I collect the works of Double Color Balls Group

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Video still from Double Color Balls Group: *Eternal Loop* (single channel video, 180 min)

Subtitle: You see, the boss is also a philosopher

1. At first, I was much intrigued by what was revealed in the posts of Double Color Balls Group on their Microblog, that is, an attitude that shows no concern for prevailing highly-valued concerns, such as the artist being the meaning carrier.
2. Works worth following include *Eternal Loop* (single channel video, 180 min) and the photography series *How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment*.
3. *How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment* is a series of photographs taken on mobile phone, where the artists impulsively imitate lifestyles of the middle class while they are doing part-time jobs in a studio. You can well imagine the purpose of such endeavor in this way: someone readily opens his palms simply to prove that there is nothing in them.
4. *Eternal Loop* is a video taken on mobile phone as well, reflecting the current situation of public as the media. The video is 3 hours in length, and sets out to challenge our inclination to hastily consume visual art works, while neglecting this habit altogether. We might laugh at such an attempt, while seeing its necessity at the same time.

## Part I: Game Started



Lin Aojie signing the collecting documents. Photo taken on March 29, 2014 at the site of project *Signifier 6000*, Huangbian Station\* Art Project Lab. Note: Huangbian Station was founded in 2013, hosted by Huang Xiaopeng and Xu Tan, aiming at improving the local art ecology and spreading contemporary art. HB Station is a non-profit art institution, part of Guangdong Times Museum. Microblog: <http://Microblog.com/hbstation>.

Let's get the game started. At the end of 2013, I made several requests for collection to a couple of artists, including my twin sister. They approved before they were able to regret their decision. In fact, I have heard some stories about the frustration my friends encountered when selling their works. The tales followed a similar pattern: it seemed that both stakeholders had a sufficient common understanding of the value and the price of the piece, but the transaction was not promptly completed. With an understanding of such perplexity and embarrassment, I issued my request for collection. Having collected several pieces, I posted some thoughts over this online, such as:

### Is collecting a fan behavior?

Posted on 2014-02-06 at 21:22:15

1. Yes.
2. Are fans something that represent the pursuit for idealization?
3. Yes.
4. What is idealization?
5. I think this kind of idealization is not exactly idolization.
6. But as a premise, you would need to admit that you appreciate, or even adore this artist.
7. Sure. However, in addition to the differences mentioned above, idolization is immutable and frozen. It rejects all the other potentials. For instance, the worship of heroes instantly denies weakness and timidity. This kind of antagonism happens way more often than can be laid out.

8. What about your antagonism?

9. I surely have mine, but it can hardly be verbalized. Antagonism results from fear, yet we find it hard to identify the outline of the things that we fear. The antagonism mentioned above is a comparatively simple one. There are situations that are a lot more complicated and internal.

10. What kind of works do you collect?

11. I collect works that I can “see”; this is one of the narratives. The other one is that I think this piece “sees” me, which makes me want to establish a more intimate relationship between us.

12. By doing this, do you think you are actually projecting and seeking for identification?

13. Yes, but this is still a little bit different from idealization. It comes down to what you want to see and what of you that you want to be seen through your collection.

14. You talk about “seeing” quite often.

15. To see is to understand.

You can tell from my posts that my collection features playfulness, but not to the point that it loses authenticity for the lack of sincerity. During that time, I collected five photography pieces of Lin Aojie, that is, one version of these five works, simply by communicating with the artist on Wechat and QQ. Then I came to know Double Color Balls Group. At first, I was much intrigued by what was revealed in the posts of Double Color Balls Group on Microblog, that is, an attitude that shows no concern for prevailing highly-valued concerns such as the artist being the meaning carrier. Double Color Balls Group is comprised of Lin Aojie and Yu Yiyi. Yiyi is currently a Beijing-based noise music and electronic music artist. The reason why I lay out their information this way is for the sake of clarifying the identity of the artists. In fact, I did not know Lin before my interest in his works had grown. It was in the spring of 2013. I was at HB Station, where my eyes caught a plateful of origami stars on the bookshelf. Upon my enquiry, Zheng Hongbin/ a Guangzhou based young curator, told me that they were made by Lin. As for the other member, Yu, I only got to meet him in person after I had decided to collect one of their works.

## **Part II: Work and Attitude**

### ***1-How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment—High Tea***

#### **a. Sketch**

*How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment* is a series of photographs taken on mobile phone, in which the artists impulsively imitate life style of the middle class when they are doing part time jobs in a studio. You can well imagine the purpose of such endeavor in this way: someone readily opens his palms simply to prove that there is nothing in them. The first piece in my collection in this series was *High Tea*.



*How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment—High Tea*, Double Color Balls Group, photograph

This is a piece that thoroughly shows their attitude towards democracy and equity: the equipment and material for the art-making is easily accessible, and the art-making process is hardly challenging. They left packages of various fast-moving consumer goods within the image: they used boxed milk and instant coffee to make latte, used instant milk tea and coffee to make Hong Kong-style Yuenyeung, used Kinder chocolate and instant coffee to make mocha, and they even relaxed over a high tea made up by Snickers, cake and tea bags they bought from Seven-eleven. They call these “the saving experiments”. Low-cost art-making like this is completely different from the fetishism held by pop artists, and it stands pettily yet firmly against the so-called “good life” upheld by refined art. They juxtaposed consumer goods and consumption symbols with pretend petty bourgeoisie taste, compressing arguable discourse structure into a two dimensional surface. They demonstrate their compromise in life with courage, yet, from the perspective of experimenting, they are still somehow revolutionary.

Coffee shops with petty bourgeoisie taste seem to take a stand like this: I watch, while enjoying my place outside the mainstream. I estimated the cost of the material in the making of this photograph; it was around 8 to 10 Chinese RMB, not an extreme display of a good deal and balance. Nevertheless, the rapid pace of consumption and its unhealthy convenience notify us that time itself is luxury, and that people have an urgent need to feed themselves within a limited period of time. Well, for sure it most directly reflects urban young men’s unsound and environmentally unfriendly way of living. This piece exerts its beauty in an unbeautiful way. It denies “taste” in life by its “very close” disguise. Exquisite works of hours of making would also become luxuries—displays with unseen tricks.

#### **b. Too Smooth to be Consumed**

Works like *How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment* are so smooth that no spot could be found to tie it up.

I made up my mind to collect these pieces once I saw them on the Microblog of Double Color Balls Group. My heart pumps hard upon the coarseness of the material, mixed in its meticulous yet casual air. The following was written when I first saw these pieces . It records the mindset at that moment more or less in a stream of

consciousness. Modified.

#anonymous art critic#

posted on 2014-01-03 at 00:12:58

1. We do not understand the void of the rich. Forget it!

2. Stall-artism/ withered spirit/ dehydrated food/ compressed biscuit/ simple, dull, and tasteless. At the line of subsistence. Stand against the lush, tasteful, delicate, emotional, “nutritious” and “to-one’s-liking” kind of art.

3. Noise, grain, rolling, out of tune. Monotonous, repetitive, drawn out, without time flowing experience, a television left with blurred screen, forced replication.

4. To be tedious is not bad. It is tedious to pretend to be interesting.

5. In their pictures (or should I say photographs), when pop artists make plastic glow with fancy colors full of materialism, they never attempt to cover up the ordinary nature of plastic that we know so well yet abhor so much..

6. Their art-making cannot guide anyone to anywhere. They insist upon standing fast on barren promise that is never “bigger than life”, though the slogan prevails in art and business. If life were full of dregs, they would neither be the seasoning nor the chicken. Compared with “chicken soup”, they are like compressed biscuits. The lack of nutrition renders them without “publicity value” and “utilizable values”.

7. For people out there who attempt to taste the “soul of artist” and wish artists to be more poetic and adorable, what Double Color Balls Group does is to turn them down. They have nothing to do with the “preferable” image of artist embraced by audience in general.

8. What are these “artists” like in life? What are they thinking about? One of the answers would be: they live in an urban city, doing what they do not like so much and what does not pay so well; they have a bit of a sense of humor when they are online.

9. Holding a poker card—a piece of Double Color Balls Group—so far you can only see the back of it, expecting any number and suit (such as heart). The backs are all the same, but maybe the Joker appears when you turn it over.

In the realm of public communications, art practices that considered worth advocating are mostly the avant-garde upholding sound living or ethics of the age. The obligation of being ethically right, to some extent, has confined our imagination in art, the authenticity and even the speed of our reaction towards life. We are born with the instinct to progress and to struggle to survive with optimism. However, for me, turning this into an expectation in

art practice, and turning art into a model of “attitude towards life”, is somehow a misdirection of taste and vision. If this had become an underlying fashion and standard, it would also be the kidnapping of ideology.

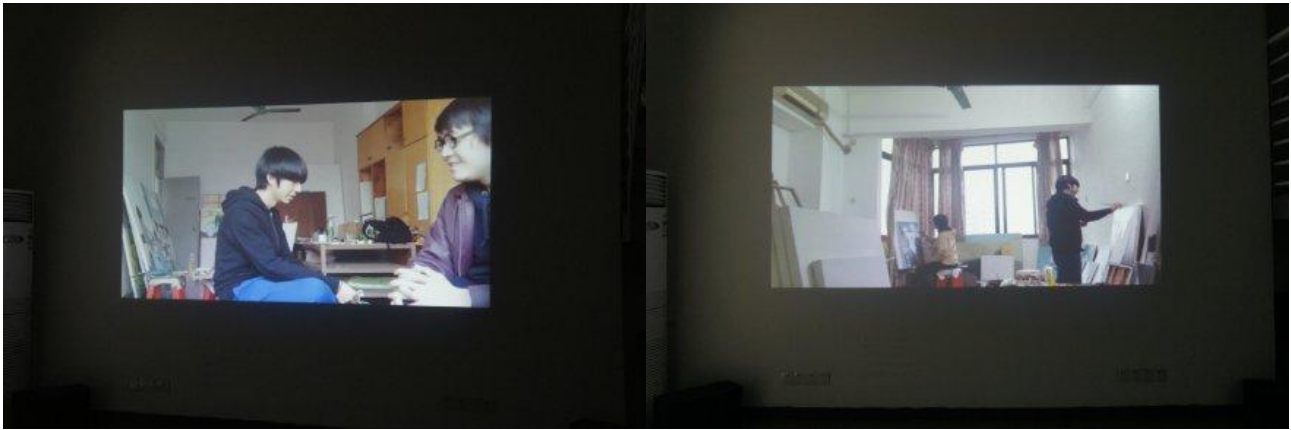
If art is supported and paid by collectors of middle class and capitalist class, and if art pieces are supposed to “make people healthier and make them relaxed”, the subtext of these pieces would be “relaxed”, which is specifically social-elite-oriented. They consume this kind of art when they are relaxed after working. If being “sound” is an ethic, this ethic had also been consumed by the art market. Being ethically correct makes art practice worth consuming, and the correctness per se is worth consuming as well. This is the reality at present. Allow me to make a joke with political overtone: it is rather dangerous to encourage the poor to relax (their guard). There is little difference between this and what the ruling class did in feudal societies; they harvested interest while preaching their loyalty towards religion and mind. If art is a new religion in this new era, I hope that it would not become a new superstition by imitating or paralyzing people’s value orientation—blindly believing in artists as wise men, blindly expecting to forget life through art, blinding worshipping the nobility of art, and blinding regarding art as the choice of the elite. Oh yes, maybe blind faith is just fashion in another form. Therefore, to stand against blind faith, maybe we should set about dealing with fashion. This idea is consistent with my motive of collecting *How to Get Rich Project I: The Saving Experiment—High Tea.*

Speaking of the motive, apart from the “free-range” kind of processing in the art-making, it is the sense of tension carried by the work that captivates my interest the most. It is undeniable that the rebel spirit that is able to withstand weighing is rare these days. Yet I found the very alternative rebellion of Double Color Balls Group among eye-fuls of exquisite art and highly detached narratives. Their rebel is not totally self-directed but slightly passive. If they had a higher standard of living, they would probably give up this angle of art-making that they are embracing now. Nevertheless, at least at this moment, these pieces are worth my attention. If the history of art-making of artist is an object with volume, one slicing is necessary as to reserve the cross section.

## *2-Eternal Loop*

### **a. Rhythm and Impression**





Exhibition view at Huangbian Station, 2013

Lin Aojie said Double Color Balls Group is a group of two, whose art-making is completely independent from each person on his own. Yu Yiyi calls himself a musician and meanwhile a fan of music. Perhaps it is because of the resonance with music that their works bear certain texture. For instance, preference for low audio quality indirectly leads to the application of blurred image and fuzzy vision, as well as the clipping mode that integrates with emotions (happy ones, sorrows, or sarcastic ones). Speaking of clipping, every now and then scenes of Lin and Yu working in the same context are interwoven in *Eternal Loop*. These scenes were recorded by Lin's phone modeled Sony Lt 26ii, which is also the one used to record *High Tea*.

The phone also recorded the "labor chants" on site. Ranging from light electronic dance music to heavy metal music, different cantus demonstrate various flowing yet fluctuating emotions. What they did in their presentation at HB Station seems to be for the sake of clarifying the relation between the film and the music: they listed the name and composer of every piece of music in *Eternal Loop* for the audience. Lin even called it "film soundtrack", which I relate to the "taking doctrine" they constantly apply in their art-making. I must say that the name of the film is also a kind of "taking"! Lin and Yu went to Observation Society on the Lunar New Year's Eve of 2014, only to find it closed. They saw a poster of Hong Kong artist Ho Wing Yee's show titled "Eternal Loop" at the door. Relating to the endless and repetitive work of their own, Lin took this title for their film. Note: Observation Society is a non-profit independent art institution located at Sui Hua Xin Cun, Haizhu District, Guangzhou, currently hosted by Anthony Yung. Website: <http://www.observationsociety.com/>

Apply multi-spot focusing, there are several ways to capture *Eternal Loop*:

- A. Numbers: 4500 RMB—price of an iPhone 5s; 700 RMB/month—rent; 12.5 RMB/ hour—wage.
- B. Poverty, life, desire, reality, dream.
- C. Focusing on specific keywords in lines: such as "parents", "boss", "United States", "wage", "public intellectuals", and "Sotheby's".
- D. Focusing on objects: such as kettle, tea bags, oil brushes, plastic stool, and ready-made frames.
- E. Focusing on the interludes: the so-called magic show, Yu's hysteric house dance, Lin's popping and moonwalk.

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When recording a video, the camera on the phone auto focuses, whose adjusting operation dims and faints the image, by which the phone seems to be endowed with life—it listens. In front of the camera, on his phone, Yu is calculating, with him limiting his daily expense, how many hours of work need to be done to get enough money to buy an iPhone 5s. He talks about himself wanting to take his parents on a trip, but the attempt fails because the aged grandma needs them to be around home. They talk about the art world and its dealings; they say they dream about selling their pieces. Surely they mention books, academic subjects and some sensitive subjects. The projection of the film on the wall is about 3 meter's wide, but still with enough definition. I joked with Lin, saying that it is actually a phone commercial. Throughout the film, the wit of the two artists can easily be detected, but there is no hint of any sublime **heroism** or attempts to modify the society.

#### **b. “Down-to-earth” Values: The Shout**

The suspected indifference and attitude of irresponsibility, as has been mentioned before, could well be demonstrated by *Eternal Loop*.

Scene was set in a studio rented by an oil painting replicating firm, **who had not paid off Lin and Yu's wage arrears for 6 months**. The studio is actually a unit in a residential building, located in Haizhu District, Guangzhou, close to Observation Society. Here the two “grassroots” struggle from financial distress while managing to make joy in adversity. They listen to music, they sing, they dance, they play; they share visions on various subjects including family, life, philosophy, social phenomena, art ecology and so forth. I once asked Lin that why Double Color Balls Group has to bear such an air of the “Diaosi” (“Diaosi” can be referred to as “loser”, is a popular Internet term used by young working class in Mainland China to express self-mockery). In response, he clarified that they are nothing like “Diaosi”; they are simply down to earth. I suppose so. According to certain surveys, more than 80% of artists earn their living by having a job. However, in exhibitions, art projects, and publications that probe into mental state and cultural vision, artists will not reveal the actual situation of their lives—no genuine emotions, needs or helplessness, and they will not mention the sense of satisfaction for them which is easily achievable with low-standard material living.

Double Color Balls Group favors ridicule, which scarcely demonstrates the worldly, positive manner commonly held by elites. Today's world favors slogans with attempts to influence or even change the world. While today's intellectuals are experimenting with the possibility of affecting people and their surroundings by their own values, these two artists are telling their annoying and absurd experience in front of a phone camera, a story about them not getting paid and having no clue how to resolve the situation. In comparison, their position can be called inferior. Most of the copywriting for biennials and triennials proclaim the mobility and the plasticity of the environment we dwell in and the fact that there are an unlimited amount of possible realities. However, the film of Double Color Balls Group seems to remind us that there still are standard answers: confrontation between the strong and the weak, and the rather stable pyramid of social hierarchy.

No one can predict the future for Double Color Balls Group. As for me, although they have not been domesticated by “capital”, they have at least have been tamed by “work”—bowing to reality. In the film, Yu says that he is worried that this job would eventually wear off his volition. It has been turned into a piece alright, but after all, it



is a rather factual life in which they trade their “work” for a living. Thus, we can argue that certain assertive judgment upon young Chinese artists, saying that they kneel down to capital too soon, has no solid ground, let alone the amusing ethical tone applied. Lin and Yu see themselves as “grassroots”. Their words can hardly be blamed by using the terms like “pursuit” and “dream”. At Huangbian Station, Anthony Yung \* remarked that he thought the film is an honest reflection of their spirit. Some might have nobler spirits, and some others’ might be rather ordinary, but there is no grading between the two; they are all “spirits”. In the realm of art, I suppose, if some people choose to be “noble”, “heroic”, or “lofty”, there will be some others who decide to be “humble”, “populist” or “down-to-earth”. I have not found any avant-garde idea of art ethics in *Eternal Loop*; it precisely disappoints our expectation of “lofty artists”. The two artists do not conceal their wants for iPhone 5s at all, which is quite a simply wish alike many youngsters’. Having seen this, I could not help but doubt certain contradictory expectation projected on artists: the ability to create subjects for fetishism while being far less materialistic than ordinary people. Note: Anthony Yung is the host of Observation Society, based in Hong Kong. He is an experienced researcher of Asia Art Archive.

The overstatement of the difference between artists and non-artists might be out of the need of the art market for certain images of artist. It might also be for the sake of ruling artists out of the world of ordinary people, which is a distorted otherizing approach. Fortunately subjective perspectives of the two artists are still accessible for us in *Eternal Loop*. If a piece had revealed enough truth, it could be spared the necessity of carrying too much fact. We have not yet been overwhelmed by life, so we can exhaust whatever efforts left to make art. Do not allow the “art→society” complex—**either the progressive idea of “serving the people” or the conservative one of “meeting the market needs”—to beat us down.**

Collectors with a sense of responsibility should facilitate the sound development of the art ecology, while artist with such sense should get involved with reality and have “innocuous interaction” with “communities”—these are words that we have known so well. However, Double Color Balls Group is not as “advanced”. They even tittered on Microblog when they found the atmosphere at certain art events “too serious”, which, in prevailing “revolutionary” discourse, can be termed as rebellious. We have already been convinced that artists exist because they are to inspire human beings, but how can someone who cannot even claim their wages back be capable of such mission? Their chuckles disappoint me yet surprise me. Artist = working class—instead of substituting reality with a piece of organized “performance art”, they disclose such an equation with a demonstration of their own life— just like giving someone “a whack on the side of the head” and actually holding sticks in their hands.

### c. Rewind

By the end of 2013 and during the Spring Festival of 2014, I asked Lin several times what he was up to. He said he was editing the film and preparing subtitling. I was also wondering if situation had been different, if they had had their six months’ worth of wages paid on time, they would still make a film like this. He said it would probably come in a different form. Undesirable suffering precipitated a piece. As the audience, we might be able to rejoice in the injustice they encountered in their personal lives—the loneliness, joy, fortitude, dejection, and humor. The film has seized my time and captured my feelings—a way too “collector-ish” statement which can well work as a closure for this part.

### Part III: Epilogue—Bedroom of the Collector

Huang Xiaopeng\* once teased the collection of certain collectors, saying that instead of the connotation and significance of the work, it is whether the piece matches the style of their living room or bedroom that is of their concern. Note: Huang Xiaopeng is one of the founders of HB Station, associate professor of Guangzhou Art Academy, and the host of the No. 5 Studio of the Oil Painting Department from year 2003 to 2013.

Unfortunately, upon receipt of the printed laminated photography of Double Color Balls Group, I immediately glued it up on the wall in my bedroom, beside the bed. To lay out more background, I need to clarify that I live in a leased apartment, too. Similar material conditions somehow makes me allied with the two artists. As an unofficial collector, the price I offer is informal compared of standards in the game of the society. I have little to do with the “system”, but I did make my commitment and I did pay, which is as formal as it should be. As I stated on Microblog, it was Double Color Balls Group that had “approved” me — a “collector” — to collect their pieces.

When handing me the piece, Lin also gave me a packet of black tea, containing 25 tea bags, and a Snickers bar. I ate the Snickers at once. A week later, I opened the packet and made a cup of tea with a tea bag for myself. My imagination flowed. Supposed that some day I became an official collector, playing a part in the museum system, what if this photograph was wanted for an exhibition? Would the “restoration of the installed setting of the content of the photograph” be an issue of concern? If so, a packet of black tea and a Snickers bar would need to be purchased and installed next to the work in the exhibition. Someone would ask what had happened since I collected it. “Hmm, I ate part of it. Hmm, is there a problem? ...”

On Monday, April 7, 2014, the president of Three Foundation\* brought me good news. Three Foundation had worked with Double Color Balls Group in a project titled “Fortune Project”. They bought 15 bets of Double Color Balls Lottery and had won 10 RMB. According to agreements of the project, 50% of the prize, after tax, goes to Double Color Balls Group, 25% to Three Foundation, and 25% to the support of HB Station. We thought it was a brilliant start, though the purchase of the bets cost 30 RMB. Note: Three Foundation is an art foundation hosted by Huang Shan. It is named after the scripture “the three begets all things of the world” in *Tao Te Ching*. It supports artist finically, ranging from 0.3 RMB to 33 RMB. Huang Shan is a young Guangzhou-based artist.



Throughout this essay, I admit that sometimes it is too brief while sometimes too wordy. The brief part is attributed to the influence Lin has on me, while the excess wordage is ascribed to what I have learned from Double Color Balls Group.

Huang He

April, 2014, in Haizhu District, Guangzhou

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Well, Lin and Yu are now both iPhone users. They said the camera comes in handy. Yu used to have a black and white scene phone. The pictures taken by that phone are beyond description. They also made a “documentary” out of their purchase of iPhone in a mall in Jiang Nan Xi, Guangzhou. It seems that any details and dialogues in that process is too significant not to be captured, and that they are not yet reconciled with commodity culture or anything alike, and they refuse to fall to it.