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Washington University In St. Louis
Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts

A New World Order

By

YUWEI PAN

BFA in Fine Art with minors in Design and Psychology
BFA Thesis Statement
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Abstract

Through my work “A New World Order,” I question the extent to which the color Millennial Pink changes our perceptions of objects and even influences our unconscious decisions, by imagining what it would look like if on the institutional level pink’s “feminizing” power is put into good use – to reduce perceived violence for a kinder society –in a fictional feminist utopia/dystopia. In this paper, I will be contextualizing my art practice with the complex implications of pink in realms of psychology, pop culture, politics and participation art, and how social construction about the color pink affects gender performance. This paper will be broken down into three concepts that inform my work: Pink Spaces, Camouflage & Violence, Propaganda & Illusion of Democracy, and I will also discuss the participatory element that merges these three concepts into a cohesive experience for the viewers.

APRIL 13, 2018

I jump up in my bed in excitement even before my alarm went off. Today is my sixteenth birthday! I comb through my messy hair with my fingers, smiling at myself in the mirror. I have been looking forward to this day for a long time, because now I am finally eligible to vote.

I sit down at the kitchen table and eat my breakfast, listening to the television that mother must have left on when she went to work. "Today is a big day for voters across the country of Fense! All citizens above the age of sixteen are required to vote and it is very important that everyone's voice is heard..."

Oh no! It is nine o'clock already. I slam the door shut, running down the street to catch the pink bus to the closest polling place. When I finally get there, I see many excited young faces like my own, reading a pronounced document on the wall that turned out to be our constitution:

We the people, in order to create a new world order and to defend our humanity, establish justice, instill empathy in our citizens, protect peace from violence, and sustain the aura of tenderness and innocence all over our country.

I finally get to the front of the line and enter one of the voting booths. I read through everything on the ballot first; all the names of the candidates I am familiar with and two propositions. Next, I carefully fill in the bubbles and drop the ballot into the transparent ballot box.

Everything is covered in a seemingly calming shade of pink: the signs, voting booths, ballots, ballot box and of course the flag. "Millennial Pink," they used to call it back in the dark ages, was initially discovered to have a strong psychological effect in decision making and perception by an artist named Yuwei Pan. A person who is immersed in millennial pink immediately appears nicer, kinder, more cheerful and less selfish. This particular shade of pink is now the official color of our government and the peaceholders. Yes, that's right, there is no police in our world, which may be difficult for people from the dark ages to understand: think of our peaceholders as the public safety officers, except that they have normal jobs like all of us and they carry around small pink pistols. I spot a few peaceholders among the voters. To be honest, although they look perfectly harmless, I am intimidated by them and always feel like I am being watched.

...
I arrive home, and I reflect on what I saw today and what it means to be a good citizen.

Though I understand that the pink is supposed to be for the good of the society, I cannot shake off the feeling that something is not right. I climb up to my father's study and pull out an old dusty folder that contains the original version of the artist Yuwei Pan's essay about the color millennial pink. It was published in May 2018...

*Fense is pink in Chinese

A New World Order

Millennial Pink is described on Pantone, the world-renowned authority of color and the largest color forecasting company, as “a quiet and peaceful pink shade that engenders an aura of innocence and purity.”¹ Pantone’s color of the year 2016, Rose Quartz or otherwise known as Millennial Pink is a toned-down version of the Barbie pink and a duller version of the baby pink. Since there is no clear definition of this particular shade of pink, I would like to propose my own: #ffb6c4 (R:255, G:182, B:196). I would describe it as a peachy-salmon color and all blue and green are taken out. Even if you are not familiar with the name of the color, you have seen this color somewhere. Since Acne Studios released its famous pink shopping bags in 2007, millennial pink has saturated fashion, advertisements, social media as well as pop culture and design (Schwartzberg). For example, in the 2014 Wes Anderson movie “The Grand Budapest Hotel,” millennial pink is used both extensively in the architectural design and in film filter. Even singer and rapper Drake caught on the trend and released his single “Hotline Bling” with a millennial pink cover. Millennial Pink’s popularity stems from its attempts to embrace a fluidity in gender identity and expression, yet it is still feminine because of deep rooted biases. Furthermore, it became a symbol for “ironic prettiness,” a de-problematized color that can then be marketed to girls who are trying to break free from gender norms, and therefore a metaphor for the camouflage of “niceness.” Putting Millennial Pink on anything, and it instantly becomes instagrammable. For example, if you take a crumbling old building and paint it Millennial Pink then it automatically becomes aesthetized.²

¹ Read more here <https://www.pantone.com/color-of-the-year-2016>

² Check out this Instagram account that collects photos of plants on pink walls that are crumbling and peeling. It is hugely popular because the contrast between the pink of the exotic looking

Through my work “A New World Order,” I question the extent to which Millennial Pink changes our perceptions of objects and even influences our unconscious decisions, by imagining what it would look like if on the institution level pink’s “feminizing” power is put into good use – to reduce perceived violence for a kinder society –in a fictional feminist utopia/dystopia. In this paper, I will be contextualizing my art practice with the complex implications of pink in realms of psychology, pop culture, politics and participation art, and how social construction about the color pink affects gender performance. This paper will be broken down into three concepts that inform my work: Pink Spaces, Camouflage & Violence, Propaganda & Illusion of Democracy, and I will also discuss the participatory element that merges these three concepts into a cohesive experience for the viewers.

Pink Spaces

If I have to write down words that I associate with the color pink, words like innocent, sweet, soft, cute, warm, young come up in conflict to words like artificial, superficial, coy, fake, cheap. Like most colors, feelings and sensibilities for pink are inevitably different for different people with different perceptions and cultural contexts. But we all somewhat agree that there is relative consensus on the social attitudes towards pink. Pink is gendered, and we have been taught that since a young age. Why is that? Because it is biological? No. According to current research, there is not a strong correlation between being female and liking pink compared across different cultures (Hurlbert, Anya C. et al.). Therefore, it must be social. Thinking back on the history of pink, pink became a feminine color only in the twentieth century and before that pink

architecture and the vibrant green of the tropical plants create a specific Instagram “aesthetic”.
<https://www.instagram.com/plantsonpink/>

was even “considered slightly masculine as a diminutive of red” (Broadway). My generation, sometimes referred to as millennials, has been challenged to rethink pink due to feminist movements (such as the “Pussyhat Project”) that either reject or reclaim pink as a feminine color. However, this rebranding of pink is a rather superficial fix of the imbalanced gender roles, and even when it is marketed as gender-neutral, it is still infused with feminine energy.



Figure 1. Pietro Nolita, New York, NY



Figure 2. Baker-Miller Pink used in a prison cell

This feminine energy is concentrated and contained in “pink spaces” in both commercial and institutional contexts. Commercial spaces like Pietro Nolita (fig.1), an Italian restaurant in

New York City,³ fully took advantage of the softness and lushness of the pink to create a romantic eating experience, redefining what Italian food can be. In a completely different context, Baker-Miller Pink, which is a shade of pink very similar to Millennial Pink, is used in jails and prisons to pacify aggressive prisoners (fig. 2). According to the research of scientist Alexander Schauss, this tone of pink reduces hostile, violent or aggressive behavior within ten to fifteen minutes (Schauss 218). Just looking at the comparison of the two images, one cannot help but be shocked at how innocent, fluffy, and pretty the first pink is, and how jarring, ugly, and violent the second pink is, despite them being almost the same color. How does the prettiness turn into something deeply frightening by becoming institutionalized? This is one of the questions that sparked my work *A New World Order*.



Figure 3. *A New World Order, Installation, 2018*

A New World Order (fig.3) is an installation consisting of a “Vote Here” sign, four voting booths, stacks of ballots, a transparent ballot box, and a large flag that hangs over the voting

³ According to the restaurant, it is a “cozy 1950s-style bar/eatery with a pink motif offering eco-friendly Italian fare & weekend brunch,” www.pietronolita.com/

booths. It is a contemplation of this use of pink, but in an institutional way. By covering everything pink, including the voting booths, sign, flag and ballots, I create a believable yet fantastical version of the voting station that we are all somewhat familiar with. On the silky flag and on both sides of the voting booths, there is the symbol of the country: one large black star with four small white stars, a heart shape that is not closed and an ominous eye without an iris. The five stars reference the iconic flag of China, which I grew up with and is ingrained in me. The heart shape looks like a uterus or raised arms. And the eye without pupil suggests that this is an authoritarian society. The omnipresent pink makes the voting process even more bizarre and Orwellian. Yet from afar, the pleasant looking pink and the alluring sign that says “VOTE HERE” pull the participant close. There is something deeply unsettling about the overwhelming use of pink in this situation that is meant to be neutral.

Camouflage & Violence

“Pink cannot exist within violence!” blared the proponents of masculinity in the military. “Pink can be just as violent as any other color!” shouted the opposition. Contrary to common belief, there are plenty of cases where pink is used in the military and weapons, but most outcomes are sadly superficial. For example, during WW2, Mountbatten Pink, which is a slightly duller cousin of Millennial Pink, was used on tanks, warships and jets as camouflage. The Mountbatten Pink was also called invisible pink, and its supposed effect was to hide the tank, warship or jet during dawn and dusk. However, Mountbatten Pink’s success was only anecdotal and sometimes made the jets more obvious when they were against a blue sky.

Many contemporary artists juxtapose the softness of the pink with the inherent violence of weaponry, including David Cerny, Sylvie Fleury, Marianne Jorgensen, and An-Sofie

Kesteleyn. I would like to highlight Cerny's Pink Tank (1991) and Kesteleyn's photo series "My Little Rifle," and compare them to my piece "SMILE! You're on display".



Figure 4. David Cerny, Pink Tank, 1991

David Cerny painted the tank that served as a WW2 Memorial in Prague pink overnight with his friends in 1991, and pink was used as a subversive color for Cerny to protest against remaining communist influences and violence. The entire tank was covered by cheap pink house paint, and it looks like a miniature toy tank from the photograph and has an almost candy like quality. A middle finger that was in the same shade of pink stood erect on the tank. Imagine how surprised the people of Prague were when they woke up and found the tank in the center of the memorial square! Because there was so much controversy over the pink, the tank was painted green (then back to pink) multiple times until it was removed all together, until its return to Prague in 2011. The pink was a rebellion against violence and it nullifies the fear that the tank and Soviet forces brought to the people of Prague.



Figure 5. An-Sofie Kesteley, *My Little Rifle*, photography series, 2013



Figure 6. An-Sofie Kesteley, *My Little Rifle*, photography series, 2013

Unlike Cerny's active covering, photographer Kesteley's use of pink in her "My Little Rifle" (fig. 5 and 6) is to contrast the childish element of pink with the serious issue of gun violence. Growing up in Europe, Kesteley was shocked to find these real rifles that are designed

and manufactured for five to six-year-olds in many American homes.⁴ She documented these little boys and girls with their first rifles, next to a note where the kids wrote about their fears. Of course, just like their stereotypically decorated bedrooms, all the girls had pink rifles and all the boys had blue rifles. The terrifying nature of the guns is unnerving next to the innocence and childishness of the kid's handwriting, dolls and stuffed animals, as well as their emotionless or ambivalent faces. The pinkness of the little toy-like guns is intended to appeal to young girls or rather their gun-loving parents. It fails to make the guns less disturbing, instead making them seem unreal and out-of-place.



Figure 7. SMILE! You're On Display, installation, 2018

In my interactive installation, “SMILE! You’re on display,” (fig. 7) four pink surveillance cameras tilt their heads to point directly at the viewer and under them there is a large sign that says “SMILE! YOU’RE ON DISPLAY.” I am exploring two layers of meaning through inviting viewers to engage with the pink cameras and signs. First, I am interested in whether

⁴ In fact, you can purchase these guns easily online from KeyStone Firearms, a firearm company producing guns for kids, at <http://www.keystonesportingarmsllc.com/> for \$129.99-359.99. They temporarily deleted their website at a five-year-old shot and killed his two-year-old sister, but now it is fully resumed.


painting something associated with violence pink makes it appear less threatening. Surveillance cameras are inherently violent for its incessant recording of both our public and private experiences, and they establish the hierarchy of who is watching who. Although the cameras and the sign are obviously fake upon close inspection, from a distance the pink has an opposite effect which makes the cameras even more menacing and hostile. Second, the piece subverts the roles of the viewer and art, by pointing the cameras at the viewers and commanding them to smile. Interacting with the installation by smiling or posting a selfie with the work on Instagram, the viewers themselves become the art. The word play “on display” instead of “on camera” establishes the illusion of the artist’s authority over the viewers. Millennial Pink combined with the “SMILE” instruction playfully mocks men who tells women to smile and the pink employed here is cynical of the way that women have always been on display, watched and controlled.

Participation Art and The Illusion of Democracy



Figure 8. Hans Haacke, MoMA Poll, 1970

In MoMA Poll (1970) by Hans Haacke (fig. 8), he challenges the institution of the museum by setting up a voting station at the entrance of Museum of Modern Art in New York. The piece is made up of a wall sign, two transparent ballot boxes, an electric counting machine and a pile of ballot paper. In my work, the device of the voting booth and the ballot box is also very important because they serve as ceremonial objects of something that the American people hold very dearly—democracy. There is a tendency of the democratization of art to be more interactive and participatory, and participation has always been an important part of my art practice. Art critic Nicolas Bourriaud came up with the term “relational aesthetics” in 1998 and described it as “A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (Bourriaud, 113).


OFFICIAL BALLOT
GENERAL ELECTION
ST LOUIS
APRIL 13, 2Q18
 VOTE LIKE THIS: ☒ Yes ☐ No

PRESIDENT (vote for one)	PROPOSITION I
YUWEI PAN <input type="radio"/>	Citizens with niceness score less than 6.4 will be subject to Peace Holder arrests and reeducation programs. Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
UWEIP ANY <input type="radio"/>	PROPOSITION II
WEIPA NYU <input type="radio"/>	Requires plastic bag fees be directed toward specified feminist projects. Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
EIPAN YUW <input type="radio"/>	
IPANY UWE <input type="radio"/>	
PAN YUWEI <input type="radio"/>	

Figure 9. Ballot detail, A New World Order



Figure 10. Installation detail, A New World Order

The sense of dystopia is heightened by the paradoxical nature of the voting process. On the ballots (fig. 9), there is a section for the presidential election and two propositions. There are six seemingly different names for the election, but if a viewer looks closely, they will find that the names are slightly different every time and are just different ways that my name can be spelled: they are all implying my name Yuwei Pan. The illusion of choice is ever more apparent and ironic because despite all the options on the ballot, there is one real option, and despite the privacy screen, the box that the ballots go into is transparent and the votes can be easily seen and monitored (fig. 10).

I am an artist just as much as I am a mediator of space and creator of a new social order. By breaking away from the pristine “white cube” of a traditional gallery space, I strive to create social circumstances. In other words, the viewing experience in the constructed social environment becomes an essential aspect of the art. Therefore, the piece “A New World Order” is created as a social event, where participants are invited into this fictional feminist utopia/dystopia to vote in its election. The event alludes to the 2016 Presidential Election of the United States, when the electoral college won over the popular vote and elected the now president Donald Trump. The election was an impactful event in my generation because there

were many first-time voters. Deciding who is representing who through the action of voting is essential, and democracy is fragile and easily destructed by a culture of anxiety, media, and foreign influences.

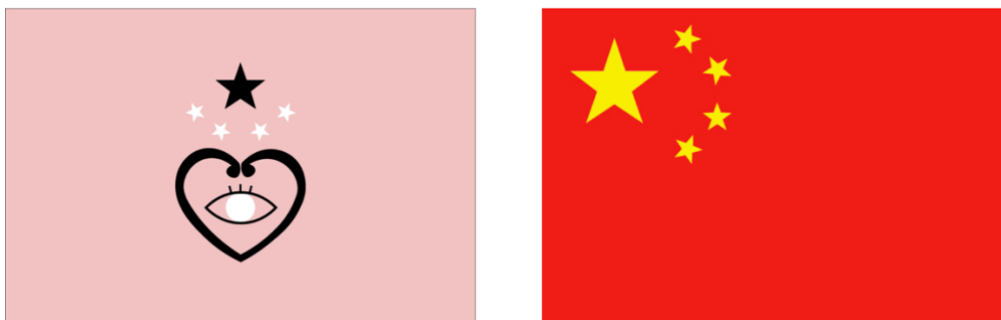


Figure 11. Fense flag and China flag

A subtler reference is to the illusion and recent crumple of democracy in China, my home country, where the constitution was changed within matters of weeks and the two-term limit for the Communist Party leader was completely erased.⁵ The design of the Fense flag was inspired by the China flag (fig. 11). The color Communist Red is used symbolically everywhere, including in the national flag, party emblem, propaganda and government spaces. The color communist red in China evokes a strong sense of nationalism, as people are conditioned to feel so since a young age. In the case of “*A New World Order*,” what happens when millennial pink becomes the national color and part of the national identity? Would it be a kinder and gentler society? Or would it be a more passive or emotionless society? There are many elements of authoritarianism in “*A New World Order*”: the institutional use of pink to control the decision-making of its citizens, and the icons and flag of the society alludes to existing authoritarian societies.

⁵ Read more about “China reappoints Xi Jinping as president with no term limit” at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/17/china-reappoints-xi-jinping-as-president-with-no-term-limit>

I close the book, and press my fingers on my temples to relieve the throbbing pain.

What does this all mean? Maybe I should take a nap. I hear my father coming upstairs, his keys bumping into his pink pistol.

Oh no! I do not have time to hide the document. I gasp as my father pushes the door open and tells me with a stern look in his eyes and a tremble in his voice to follow him...

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