

THE VALUE OF THINGS

It is evident that the value of things is not universal. Things do not have a specific value when they are created or found in nature. Value is an acquired characteristic that depends on many factors, such as time, scarcity, and the human power used to make them... But this value is relative, because all of these factors are also relative depending on the person who is valuing these things. Different things can have different values depending on who is defining that value, so value cannot be considered intrinsic. Should things have a universal value accepted by our whole society? Would it make transactions fairer, more balanced? This subjectivity on the attribution of value is one of the reasons why most transactions are unfair, because the value of the transacted item is not determined from both sides.

When we talk about the value of immaterial beliefs, feelings, and thoughts, it is even more difficult to define general ideas or concepts because they are all purely subjective. The concept of sacred or holy is very complex and has blurred boundaries. In this project I want to use the concept of holy when it is associated with material things. Some material objects become holy, and shift their standard value to a most elevated one, always determined by someone or a community with common beliefs. A piece of wood, some melted bronze that has become a statue, an image, something valuable just through human work, defines a new, higher value as Marx explained. But what happens when the value changes again, when the same thing has this special, holy unexplainable value just because a new abstract idea is associated to this same thing?

In most religions all the images of gods and things related to sacred places are covered in gold. Gold becomes the channel to make objects valuable in a spiritual way. Things that were merely simple objects acquire a new sacred dimension if they are covered with gold. This idea goes further in Buddhist countries where gold represents protection against spirits and gods. Gold is used to protect homes, is worn in various shapes as jewelry to protect the body and soul, and of course, it is used in all sacred rituals.

The meaning of gold is widespread in all cultures, but the presence of gold and its meaning has evolved with society and scarcity. Golden things should be things made entirely with gold, gold shaped in a new form. Since gold is a rare material on earth and access to holy items and spaces should be open to everyone, this idea changed so that golden things were covered in gold through gold leaf, an extremely long and delicate process that has of course been made by hand for thousands of years.

Nowadays with the rise of population and the same amount of gold on earth, golden is no longer something covered in this thin layer of gold; now golden is just a coat of paint, plastic, or any other material that imitates gold. This is a very interesting paradox because the value of things is not defined anymore by the presence of this rare material, but just the idea of it. Something golden is appreciated as expensive and valuable, independently of the material that was used to make it.

Gold is the essence of valuable because it is scarce. In this project, I also want to discuss this new concept of scarcity. Water is obviously a most valuable material, but it is not considered as valuable as gold because it is still a widespread material. All residue that we create was something useful or important a short time ago. The relative value of materials is again clearly visible when we talk about residue. Some materials are trash in some countries and are an economical resource for others. Trash can be a business, and tons of trash are annually exported, such as raw material for recycling. In 2018 China stopped importing plastic residue for recycling, so now plastic becomes a residue instead of a resource. In this project I will work with ocean plastic found on the Songkhla beach, as it is becoming one of the most significant threats to our planet and it is a huge common challenge for all humanity.

As we are able to define the relative value of things, we can also work to change the values that are actually wrongly attributed. After a deep revision of our scale of values we can reconsider again the value of residue and the value of material things. In this proposal I use the most universal meaning of valuable through the use of gold to give a new meaning to trash. In this work, found objects, that are each just a piece of material, recover their value when are covered in gold. Suddenly these pieces are not trash anymore and become something valuable, something that have an intrinsic value. But are these shiny art pieces as valuable as they look? I use the concept of golden to play with our senses and make something about our perception of what is valuable. Some pieces are covered in real gold and some pieces are covered in fake gold; but fake gold can have different values and I explored many gold dealers in order to have the wider variety of golden vary from cheap “golden” leaf to real gold, with a range of more than ten times the price. So..... what is valuable to you?