Constructing a Place of Urban Memory: Exploring the Post-Industrial Landscape of Ma'anshan through Painting

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Abstract
This research project investigates the formation and evolution of the post-industrial landscape in Ma'anshan within the context of urbanization. The natural and cultural dimensions of former industrial wastelands are essential components of the city's development, and their spatial heterogeneity enhances the cultural diversity and experiential depth of urban spaces. The renewal of industrial heritage introduces innovative development strategies by promoting spatial regeneration and industrial reactivation. The study highlights the works of Hans-Gerhard Meyer, Michael Stasinos, and Huang Wei—artists who engage with themes of memory, spirit, and space by visually interpreting post-industrial elements through landscape and architectural representation. Through painting as the central medium, this research contextualizes and reconstructs urban memory by exploring Ma'anshan's post-industrial sites. The project effectively integrates themes of landscape, urbanization, modernization, and cultural identity to shape a distinctive and compelling urban environment. By doing so, it contributes valuable insights into urban renewal practices and the construction of memory spaces, offering meaningful references for future urban planning and artistic engagement with post-industrial contexts.
Keywords: Memory, Urbanization, Post-industrial Landscape, Urban Space, Ma'anshan

Introduction
The process of urbanization is often accompanied by population growth and the relocation of industrial zones. As a result, former factories, railways, docks, and other infrastructure within older city areas are gradually abandoned, giving rise to distinctive post-industrial landscapes. These industrial wastelands, encompassing both natural and cultural elements, become important components of the urban environment. Their spatial heterogeneity and cultural diversity significantly enhance the city's cultural experience (Zhang, 2015).

Ma'anshan, located in the southeast of Anhui Province, developed as a city through the steel industry. In 1953, the Chinese government established the Ma'anshan Iron and Steel Company (hereafter referred to as Ma'anshan Iron and Steel) to promote national industrial development. On this foundation, Ma'anshan Town (1954) and Ma'anshan Mining Area (1955) were subsequently established. With the continued growth of Ma'anshan Iron and Steel, the city of Ma'anshan was officially founded in October 1956 (Yin, Luo, Cheng, Zheng, & Zhang, 2010, p. 330).

Following China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 and its deeper integration into the global economy, industrialization and urbanization entered a phase of accelerated development (Liu, 2022). Reflecting this shift, the 2002 Ma'anshan Urban Master Plan repositioned the city's identity, moving away from its traditional steel-centric role. The new vision redefined Ma'anshan as "an important modern processing and manufacturing base in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and a riverside landscape garden tourism city" ("Study on the Overall Positioning of Ma'anshan City", n.d.).

To achieve this new urban identity, the Ma'anshan municipal government initiated a comprehensive transformation strategy, reshaping local industries, urban spaces, markets, and the environmental framework (Yin, 2010, p. 331). A significant byproduct of industrial restructuring has been the emergence of idle industrial brownfields—key elements of the city's stock land resources. These sites represent both a challenge and an opportunity: their renewal through spatial regeneration and industrial revitalization offers fresh solutions for urban development. However, as Ke (2021, p. 1) points out:

This protection and renewal method is mostly based on short-term economic benefits, and most of the reuse of industrial relics is guided by policies and urban renewal, which often makes us ignore the social relationship network behind the industrial relics and lacks a systematic review of the subjects and specific ways of participation in the protection of industrial heritage, as well as an in-depth exploration of the relationship between the public and the space. As a cultural system with the collective memory of industrial, cultural cities, industrial production space, and living space show a trend of segmentation and homogenization.

As unique carriers of production-oriented urban civilization, industrial relics demand a more nuanced renewal process—one that integrates urban memory and functional continuity. Embedding historically meaningful functions into specific urban blocks allows these spaces to become active sites of collective memory, fostering both historical continuity and renewed urban vitality. It is essential to recognize not only the physical restoration of industrial ruins but also the industrialization process and lived experiences of urban residents that define these spaces. These elements form the core spirit of the post-industrial landscape and serve as key drivers in shaping urban identity and cultural memory (Zhang, n.d.).

Project Outline
This research project employs painting as a medium to contextualize and reconstruct a site of urban memory by exploring the post-industrial landscape of Ma'anshan. The study investigates the incorporation of memory elements within this landscape and examines strategies for preserving and reshaping collective memory in the context of urban renewal.

The visual sources utilized in the project include field photography, internet news imagery, and materials disseminated through social media platforms.

The project adopts a semi-abstract artistic style, extracting and reorganizing memory-related elements from the post-industrial landscape. These elements are synthesized from diverse image sources to construct densely layered environments that visually represent urban memory. By integrating both historical and contemporary components of the cityscape, the paintings aim to evoke a dialogue between past and present within the urban context.

The primary focus is on the preservation and reconstruction of collective memory during the urban renewal process. The objectives of the project are as follows:

- To analyze the functional transformation of post-industrial spaces that embody the collective memory of Ma'anshan's urban environment.
- To explore the visual aesthetics derived from urban memory and the spirit of place within Ma'anshan city.

Related Theoretical Ideas

Urban Memory

Memory is not only a process of emotional experience but also an emotional force that sustains social reproduction (Fan, 2017, p. 60). The identity and continuity of a place are shaped by the diverse individuals and groups—ethnic, religious, or cultural—who have inhabited it over time (Lewicka, 2008, p. 213). However, intergenerational gaps often disrupt this continuity. As Lim (2000, p. 272) notes, younger generations are often unable to share in the childhood or adolescent memories of their parents, as many of the places where their parents once lived, played, or formed memories have since disappeared.

To bridge this gap, it becomes essential to establish connections through what Lewicka (2008) terms "urban reminders." These are spatial or architectural elements that serve as tangible links to the past, enabling both individual and collective memories to be preserved and reactivated within the evolving urban landscape. He explains:

''Urban reminders'', the leftovers from previous inhabitants of a place, may influence the memory of places either directly, by conveying historical information, or indirectly — by arousing curiosity and increasing motivation to discover the place's forgotten past (p. 214).

Crinson (2005) argues that architecture functions as a repository of collective memory, where built forms serve not only practical purposes but also preserve and reflect the shared experiences of communities (p. xxiv). Through its enduring materiality, urban architecture translates intangible histories into tangible expressions, making memory visible and accessible. As DemiRel et al. (2023, p. 312) emphasize, these structures allow present generations to engage with the lived experiences of the past, even when direct access to those experiences is no longer possible. This temporal displacement means that buildings and urban forms often carry narratives of previous generations, creating a collective story that continues to evolve.

Lim (2000, p. 272) further supports this by noting that visual memories—whether through architectural features, images, or artworks—act as psychological connectors between generations, especially when those generations are separated by vastly different social and spatial realities. According to DemiRel et al. (2023, p. 301), urban memory is a socially

constructed phenomenon, shaped by cultural, political, and environmental influences. It is continuously rewritten and reinterpreted based on present needs and values.

As Rose-Redwood et al. (2008, p. 161) point out, the memories made visible in the urban landscape are not neutral or accidental; they result from selective processes that highlight certain narratives while suppressing others. The city, therefore, becomes a curated space of memory—a complex layering of what is remembered and what is forgotten. Crinson (2005, p. xii) describes this as a process of material change and continuity, where cities evolve in form but carry residual traces of their historical identities. Amid widespread urban transformation, we are now witnessing a renewed interest in collective memory, as communities strive to reclaim meaning in spaces increasingly threatened by cultural erasure and "historical amnesia" (Rose-Redwood et al., 2008, p. 161).

Related Art Practices
Hans-Gerhard Meyer

Figure 1. HafenCity. 2016. Acrylic on Canvas. 98x61cm.

Hans-Gerhard Meyer is a German visual artist, born in Göttingen in 1959, known for his cityscape paintings that capture the spirit and transformation of urban environments. One of his notable subjects is HafenCity, a major urban redevelopment project in Hamburg, Germany. HafenCity is one of the largest and most ambitious inner-city redevelopment projects in Europe. It involves the transformation of approximately 157 hectares of former port and industrial land along the Elbe River into a vibrant, modern urban district. This area once served as a central node for shipping and trade but had become underutilized due to the decline of traditional port functions.

At the heart of HafenCity's transformation is the Elbphilharmonie, an iconic concert hall designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. Completed in 2017, the Elbphilharmonie was built on top of a historic brick warehouse (Kaispeicher A), merging old industrial heritage with a bold modern glass structure resembling waves or sails. It symbolizes Hamburg's effort to reimagine its industrial past into a cultural future.

In his painting, Meyer reflects this dynamic change. Rather than simply depicting architectural landmarks, he aims to convey the aspiration and vision of a new urban identity. He portrays buildings like the Elbphilharmonie and Marco Polo Tower not just as structures but as symbols of transformation and urban renewal. His work integrates subtle social

commentary, highlighting how cities evolve to accommodate new ways of living, working, and interacting.

As Meyer himself explains, he wanted to depict HafenCity as a "growing vision of a city of the future." In his painting, children playing on a large wooden ship in the sand symbolize the new generation's interaction with these evolving spaces—signaling not only the reuse of space but also the continuity of memory and identity through urban design. Ultimately, Meyer's approach captures the layered nature of modern urbanism—where the past is not erased but recontextualized. His work contributes to the broader discourse on urban memory, transformation, and the role of art in documenting cultural shifts. For HafenCity, Meyer described it like this:

The HafenCity in Hamburg is growing into an interesting and attractive district that is also expensive. Attractive are the Elbphilharmonie and Marco Polo Tower next to the Unilever building. I wanted to paint this growing vision of a city of the future. But how to start? The Elbphilharmonie is repeatedly discussed from various viewpoints. I wanted to have it restrained in the image. Even the Marco Polo Tower is a very striking building, which stands for the HafenCity. Ultimately, cities are built for people, and this is what I wanted to show ("HafenCity/HarbourCity Painting", n.d.).

He goes on to explain that a large wooden playboat lying in the sand was "conquered" by children—a metaphor for how the next generation will grow up to "conquer" HafenCity itself. The playboat is not just a playground structure; it symbolizes the city's maritime heritage and serves as a vessel of urban memory, referencing HafenCity's past as a thriving port. In this way, the artwork subtly connects childhood imagination with urban transformation, showing how memory, space, and identity intersect across time.

Michael Stasinos

Figure 2. Gasworks Park. 2019. Oil on three panels. 30" h×136".

Michael Stasinos is known for his detailed and large-scale paintings that document the cultural anthropology of cities such as Seattle, Tacoma, and various European locations ("Michael Stasinos", n.d.). His work does more than represent cityscapes; it explores the social, historical, and everyday character of urban environments—capturing not only buildings and landmarks but also the people, signs, and subtle details that define a place's identity.

One of the sites featured in his work is Gas Works Park, located on the north shore of Lake Union in Seattle. This park is unique in that it was redeveloped from the former Seattle Gas Light Company plant, a gasification facility that once powered parts of the city. Today, it stands as a prominent example of industrial heritage repurposed into public space.

Gas Works Park preserves many elements of the original plant. Some structures have been left as industrial ruins, while others have been restored, repainted, and reimagined, notably as part of a children's "play barn", which was creatively constructed using parts of the old exhauster-compressor building ("Gas Works Park", n.d.-b). This transformation reflects a broader urban approach—integrating memory, play, and landscape—where industrial past meets ecological and recreational present.

In his painting of Gas Works Park, Stasinos provides a rich, almost hyperrealistic representation of the site. He meticulously depicts the old gasification plant, including its towering structures and textured surfaces, and places it within a vividly animated environment. The lawn in front of the plant is rendered with great care, showing Canada geese grazing, people lounging, and children playing. Overhead, planes fly and kites drift in the sky, blending human activity, nature, and industry into a unified scene. This attention to micro and macro elements—from architecture to atmosphere—demonstrates how a site like Gas Works Park becomes more than just a converted industrial zone. It becomes a living archive of urban transformation, a space where memory, function, and aesthetics intersect, and where past industry is repurposed into present-day communal experience. As the artist himself said:

In my urban landscapes, I pursue the culture and "anthropology" of a place, not only by capturing the buildings, the streets, and the highways but everything right down to the graffiti, the signs, and the garbage on the street. Developing a strong composition while simultaneously pursuing this level of detail is a balancing act and an ongoing challenge ("Artist's Statement.", n.d.).

Therefore, the painter's meticulous depiction captures both the current functions of Gas Works Park and the industrial history embedded in the urban memory.

Huang Wei

Figure 3. Shougang Ruins Park. 2022. Oil painting. 30×50cm.

Huang Wei, a male freelance painter born in Beijing in 1959, depicts the Shougang area, which has been transformed into an industrial heritage park. The Shougang Industrial Heritage Park preserves valuable historical relics, including blast furnaces, cooling towers, specialized railway lines, and locomotives, quietly chronicling the city's industrial history and urban evolution ("The Weathered Factory Building Witnesses The Beauty of Industrial Heritage," 2023).

In the foreground of the painting, vehicles pass by while pedestrians stroll, and tourists ride bicycles along the park's streets, reflecting the site's contemporary recreational use. On

the left side of the middle ground, three blast furnaces stand prominently. Blast Furnace No. 3, built in 1958, was operational until February 1970 before undergoing a major overhaul. Its initial production cycle lasted 11 years, making it the first blast furnace in Shougang to surpass a decade without overhaul. After decades of operation, production finally ceased in December 2010, when the last furnace completed smelting molten iron, marking it as one of the longest-functioning blast furnaces in China.

Blast Furnace No. 3 has since been converted into a museum—the first renovation project in the country to restore blast furnaces and auxiliary facilities. This museum follows a strategy of "static protection and dynamic regeneration," carefully utilizing industrial relics to preserve the unique urban memory while adapting to modern needs ("The Weathered Factory Building Witnesses The Beauty of Industrial Heritage," 2023).

The Studio Investigation
The materials chosen for the studio's investigation are drawn from Ma'anshan's post-industrial landscapes, buildings, and cityscapes, incorporating elements of the city's urban memory. The project primarily focuses on Ma'anshan Maker Park, Magang Smart Park, Railway Cultural Park, and Railway Cafe—sites rich in post-industrial urban memory. Through processes of deconstruction and reorganization, these spaces are transformed into commercial environments that evoke and preserve the industrial heritage of the city.
The objective is to establish a meaningful memory connection: between individuals and their childhoods, between the current generation and previous generations, and between people and the urban fabric itself.

Childhood Memories of the Red Wall
The work in this phase is titled "Childhood Memories of the Red Wall." It seeks to convey the urban childhood memories of contemporary youth, who serve as key witnesses to the city's development. Due to historical circumstances, China maintained close diplomatic and industrial ties with the Soviet Union during its period of large-scale industrialization. As a result, many industrial facilities were built in the Soviet architectural style. A defining feature of this style is the use of red brick façades, which powerfully evoke the urban memory of that era.

The artwork is based on the exterior of Maker Park, formerly the laboratory of the Ma'anshan Mining Research Institute, located at Huashan District, Ma'anshan City. This site was originally part of the Sinosteel Group's research facilities and played a pivotal role in the city's industrial history. Today, it has been revitalized into a modern cultural and nightlife landmark, featuring art tea bars, restaurants, night markets, sports and cultural venues, and more ("A New Landmark for Ma'anshan's Nightlife! A New Internet Celebrity Check-In Spot!", 2022).

This creative phase unfolded in three stages which are sketching – capturing the basic form and structure of the subject, paper cutting and assembly – experimenting with composition and layered representation, and color sketches – adding mood, tone, and emotional resonance through color. The process culminated in the final version of the work.
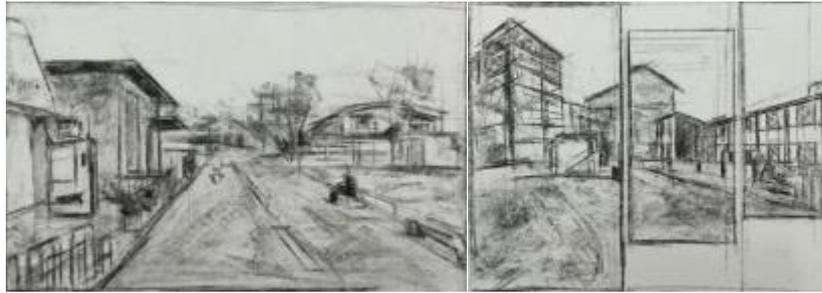
Figure 4. Sketch 1. 30.5×48cm.   Figure 5. Sketch 2. 29×36cm.

Sketch 1 features key elements that highlight the unique industrial character of Maker Park. These include preserved Soviet-style red-brick buildings, a red robotic Coca-Cola vending machine, a fence constructed from repurposed sewer pipes, and a container structure with distinct industrial features. The sketch employs a single-point perspective, allowing for a broader and more coherent inclusion of multiple buildings and design elements within one composition.

In Sketch 2, the composition focuses on four representative red-brick buildings in Maker Park. These buildings reflect varying degrees of preservation and renovation—some remain intact, others have been partially restored, and some are completely modernized. This deliberate contrast visually expresses the passage of time and artistic interpretation of historical transitions. The work integrates these changes to reflect the evolving trends in modern industrial history.

The sketch is presented as a triptych using panels of different sizes, resulting in a composition that appears visually dynamic and rhythmic—adding a sense of movement and layered meaning to the viewer's experience.

Figure 6. Paper cutting splicing 1

The first group of paper-cut collages is divided into two categories: red-brick buildings and white-exterior buildings found in Maker Park. In these experimental compositions, traditional perspective relationships are intentionally disrupted. By breaking the expected visual hierarchy, the splicing technique creates dynamic contrasts. The collision of red and white tones visually symbolizes the shifting eras—highlighting the transformation from an industrial past to a commercial present.

Figure 7. Paper cutting splicing 2

The second group of paper-cut collages explores the juxtaposition of past and present within the same building. By selecting photographs of the same structure taken from identical viewpoints but at different points in time, the collage merges new and old architectural elements. This direct contrast between historical and contemporary states not only highlights the physical transformation of the building but also reinforces the theme of urban memory—emphasizing how architecture serves as a witness to the city's evolving identity.

Figure 8. Color sketch – composition 1

Color Sketch 1 features four representative buildings. To emphasize their façades and distinctive color characteristics, the composition arranges the buildings horizontally in sequence, presented as an extended scroll-like format. Suggests a deliberate selection of buildings that best represent the theme or visual identity of the site (likely from Maker Park or similar). Furthermore, The scroll format is metaphorical (or literal if the work is designed that way), evoking traditional Chinese handscrolls and suggesting a narrative or timeline-like viewing experience—emphasizing continuity and sequence.

Figure 9. Green Space, Jialing Tea House, Rongyuehui Seafood Hotpot

Color Sketch 2 features three main architectural elements: Green Space (formerly Shuiye Building No. 49), Jialing Tea House, and Rongyuehui Seafood Hotpot (formerly Factory Building No. 47). Like Color Sketch 1, this composition uses a horizontal scroll format to present the buildings in sequence.

The exterior wall of Green Space is orange-red, Jialing Tea House has a modern white façade, and Rongyuehui retains a traditional red exterior. The three buildings are arranged one behind the other, creating a layered visual narrative. While the composition reflects the

transformation into contemporary commercial spaces, it also subtly evokes the memory of the iconic red-brick industrial architecture. Ultimately, this sketch was selected for development into the final oil painting.

Figure 10. Color sketch – composition 2

Figure 11. Youdao Brewing, Trees, and Projection

During the development of the color design, it was decided that the composition would adopt a one-point perspective to create spatial depth and visual coherence. To enhance the clarity of the scene, the open booths of the Jialing Tea House were removed from the composition. Since the building heights of Green Space (a Western restaurant on the left) and Rongyuehui (a hotpot restaurant on the right) were visually similar, the building on the left was replaced with Youdao Craft Beer Bar, a taller structure. The bar's façade is adorned with logos of various beer brands, visually emphasizing the commercial character of contemporary urban transformation.

To better convey the historical layers of Maker Park and evoke childhood memories, the artist carefully selected and incorporated the park's mature trees and prominent tree outcrops into the composition, enriching the visual narrative and grounding the scene in lived experience.

Figure 12. Childhood memories of the red wall, Oil on Canvas, 60×150cm.

The composition of this work is carefully balanced, creating a calm and inviting atmosphere. The buildings positioned on the left and right sides of the image are arranged in an almost mirror-symmetrical layout, with their facades retaining their original architectural colors. This symmetry provides visual stability while emphasizing the tension between

preservation and transformation. The retention of original colors grounds the viewer in a sense of historical continuity, while subtle commercial alterations signify the site's evolution from an industrial to a consumer-oriented space.

The use of one-point perspective guides the viewer's attention toward the white tea set positioned at the center of the composition. This focal point is not merely a decorative object; it acts as a cultural and emotional anchor, representing a moment of pause and reflection amidst urban transformation. Positioned at the vanishing point, the tea set underscores themes of intimacy, tradition, and daily life—serving as a bridge between past and present.

Although one of the buildings features the most modernized appearance, it still preserves traces of its original form and lifestyle. This fusion of old and new offers viewers a greater sense of belonging, suggesting that modernization does not necessarily erase memory but can instead coexist with it in meaningful ways. Natural elements such as trees and their shadows are intentionally preserved in the composition. These elements not only add visual balance and soften the architectural geometry, but they also symbolize continuity and resilience. They subtly communicate that while the industrial spirit may no longer dominate, it still lingers in the landscape, embedded in the textures, forms, and atmosphere of the site.

The overall color palette is tinged with nostalgic hues, designed to awaken personal and collective memory. The warm tones evoke a sense of time passed and invite viewers to reflect on their own experiences with similar urban transitions, thus fostering a deeper emotional connection and sense of place.

Railway Memories of the Industrial City
The work in this phase is titled "Railway Memories of the Industrial City." Ma'anshan, a city historically shaped by the steel industry, holds a deep connection to the railway line that runs through it—forming a distinct and lasting urban memory for its residents.

The piece is based on the Third Railway Café, located beside the railway crossing on Jiankang Road in the Huashan District. This unique café is built parallel to the railway tracks, which still serve an active industrial function—connecting the local mine to the Magang Group. Freight trains pass through daily, transporting iron ore, reinforcing the café's location as a living reminder of Ma'anshan's industrial heritage.

Visually, the storefront resembles a stationary train car, evoking the image of a paused moment in transit, as if awaiting the conductor's return. Sitting inside the café, watching trains deliver iron ore just beyond the window, offers visitors a vivid and immersive experience of railway-centered urban memory. This creative phase included two stages of exploratory color design, which allowed for visual experimentation and refinement before completing the final version.

Figure 13. Color Sketch 1 Triptych. 9×9cm×3.

Color Sketch 1 focuses on a mid-ground view of the Railway Café, accompanied by two interior perspectives that frame the passing train through the café windows. Presented as a triptych, the composition effectively captures the spatial and visual experience of the Railway Café, highlighting its connection to the surrounding railway environment. However, this version directly uses reference images without incorporating railway memory elements from other Ma'anshan locations, resulting in a somewhat visually limited and thematically narrow representation.

To address this, Color Sketch 2 expands upon the initial concept by integrating additional railway and industrial memory scenes, including Railway Cultural Park, Magang Zhiyuan, Oriental Pearl 1956 Cultural Street, Drop Espresso, and Ban.C&A Café. While retaining the triptych format, the composition adopts a 16:9 film aspect ratio to enhance its dramatic visual impact.

In this revised version, the triptych unfolds as follows:
- The first panel presents a distant exterior view of the Railway Café;
- The second panel offers a close-up interior view looking outward;
- The third panel reverses the perspective, showing a close-up from the exterior looking inward.

The latter two panels are developed from the first and are connected through framed window views, establishing a visual dialogue between interior and exterior spaces. By incorporating diverse scenes and shifting perspectives, Color Sketch 2 presents a richer, more immersive narrative and has been selected as the final completed version.

Figure 14. The Third Railway Café, the runway and rainbow rails, Drop Espresso, the SteamTrain Café, the historic wall, and the landscape vegetation next to the rainbow rails

In the first color sketch, the main elements of the Third Railway Café scene include the steam train café, rainbow-colored rails, and Drop Espresso. The composition maintains a one-point perspective, with the vanishing point centered on a black locomotive in the distance. The railway café serves as the primary focus, occupying approximately two-thirds of the left side of the image. Its side door faces the viewer, and the warm orange light emanating from within guides the audience's gaze.

The traditional rails from the original reference image are replaced with the blue plastic tracks and rainbow rails from Railway Cultural Park, reflecting the area's transformation into a commercial, entertainment, and leisure space. At the end of this railway line, a steam locomotive café is planned, further enhancing the industrial heritage theme.

On the right side of the composition stands Drop Espresso, an industrial-style café located in Ma'anshan. It occupies about one-fifth of the frame and features black and gray tones that provide visual balance to the warmer colors on the left. The black advertising wall originally present on the left side of the café in the reference image is replaced by a historical wall from Oriental Pearl 1956 Cultural Street, enriching the image's railway and industrial associations. Additionally, the landscape vegetation on the left side of the tracks aligns with the greenery along the left side of the rainbow rail route, maintaining a cohesive environmental context.
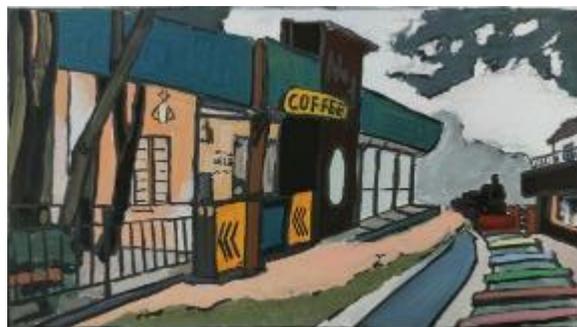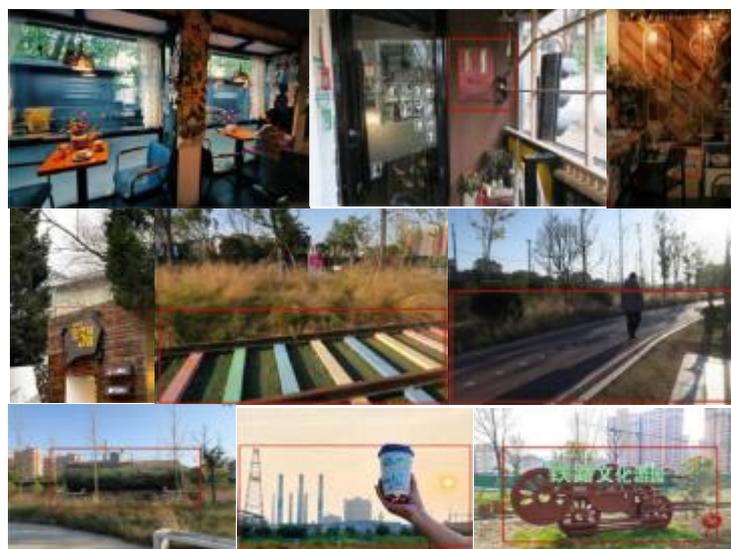

Figure 15. The first color sketch

Figure 16. Railway cafe interior, red logo, track model, brown logo, rainbow rails, red runway, tanker, Magang Smart Park, landscape sculpture

In the second color sketch, the main elements of the central panel include the Railway Cultural Park and Magang Smart Park, alongside the Third Railway Café. The composition preserves the interior and architectural framing of the railway café from the original source image.

To enrich the railway theme, the interior of the middle column was replaced with a railway track model positioned on the left side of the Railway Café-Bar. Additionally, the brown logo from the main entrance of the Railway Café on the left was incorporated into the right column. The lower right corner of the image features the red logo from the right side of the Railway Café entrance.

The composition visually connects interior and exterior spaces through glass windows. Outside the window, the passing train is replaced by a landscape sculpture comprising rainbow rails, a red plastic runway, a painted oil tanker, railway skeletons from Railway Culture Park, and the painted blast furnace and chimney of Magang Zhiyuan—elements that deepen the industrial and railway narrative.

Figure 17. The second and third color sketches

Figure 18. Third Railway Café exterior, white logo, Third Railway Café bar counter, Third Railway Café stalls, and Ban C&A Café interior

In the first color sketch, the main elements include the Third Railway Café and the Ban.C&A Café. The composition largely follows the exterior architecture and framing of the

Railway Café from the source image, with slight adjustments. Notably, the yellow advertising word "COFFEE" is repositioned toward the right visual center to enhance balance and focus.

Additional details enrich the commercial character of the scene: the white logo originally on the left wall of the Railway Café is incorporated into the lower right corner of the poster located to the left of the main entrance; the Railway Café bar signage is added to the round window on the brown iron wall; the Railway Café stand is placed in the middle rectangular window; and the Ban.C&A Café stand is slated for inclusion in the right window. These additions collectively strengthen the sense of commercial vibrancy and activity within the space.
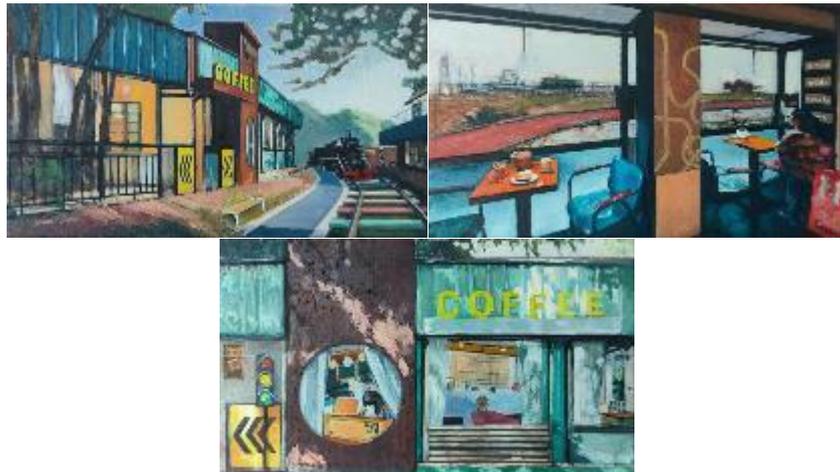

Figure 19. Railway Memories of the Industrial City, Oil on Canvas, 45×240cm

The first panel presents the Third Railway Café's exterior in striking detail. The building's outer wall, constructed from weathered brown iron, instantly transports the viewer to a bygone industrial era marked by grit and resilience. This rusted façade embodies the raw materiality and spirit of the city's steel industry heritage. Adjacent to the door, the teal iron door subtly evokes the image of the historic green train that once defined this era, forging a strong symbolic link to Ma'anshan's railway past. The blue runway and vibrant rainbow-colored rails introduce a dynamic splash of color, signaling the park's modern function as a space for leisure and entertainment. This colorful overlay both contrasts with and harmonizes alongside the more muted industrial tones, visually narrating the complex coexistence of past and present. These elements transform the space into a site of memory and renewal, bridging old industrial identity with new urban vitality.

The second panel transports the viewer inside the Third Railway Café, which is deliberately designed to mimic the experience of riding a green train. The benches resemble train seats, and the rail ornaments adorning the central pillars reinforce the railway motif. This immersive design invites the audience to feel as though they are aboard a moving train, evoking sensations of travel, transition, and nostalgia. Through the window, the industrial relics of the railway park come into view: painted tank cars and skeletal railway sculptures stand as tangible reminders of the city's industrial roots. These artifacts visually and conceptually contrast with the red plastic rails and rainbow rails visible outside—symbols of the city's ongoing urban renewal and transformation.

Together, these contrasting elements create a poignant dialogue between heritage and modernization, encouraging viewers to reflect on the importance of remembering history while embracing progress. The juxtaposition reminds the audience to honor the city's industrial legacy even as it evolves.

The third panel invites the viewer to step back and observe the Third Railway Café from the outside. The building's industrial exterior decorations, rugged and authentic, contrast with the bustling commercial atmosphere inside, where a lively bar and food stalls operate. Prominently displayed is a Ma'anshan Foodie Map hanging among the stalls, grounding the café within its local cultural context. This map not only offers practical information but also fosters a sense of community, identity, and belonging for residents and visitors alike. This panel encapsulates the coexistence of industrial heritage and contemporary urban life, revealing how spaces once devoted to heavy industry can be successfully adapted into vibrant social and commercial hubs without losing their historical resonance.

Together, the triptych presents a richly layered urban narrative, offering audiences an intimate encounter with Ma'anshan's railway memories within a newly transformed urban space. In an age when many cities face homogenization and loss of unique character, this work powerfully illustrates how memory and place-making preserve local identity. By preserving the industrial atmosphere through architectural details and symbolic elements, the artwork fosters a profound sense of belonging for both current residents and future generations. It serves as a visual testament to the city's history, ensuring that the stories of Ma'anshan's industrial past continue to resonate amid ongoing urban change.

Conclusion

This research project offers an in-depth visual exploration of how urban memory—the collective recollections, emotional attachments, and historical experiences of a city's residents—can be preserved, interpreted, and reimagined in the context of post-industrial transformation. Focusing on the city of Ma'anshan, which has undergone rapid industrial decline and urban renewal, the study uses painting as a critical tool to analyze, document, and reconstruct sites that hold symbolic value in the city's memory.

Two key case studies—Maker Park and the Third Railway Café—are central to this exploration. These locations, once part of the city's industrial infrastructure, have been repurposed into commercial and leisure spaces. However, they still retain physical traces (e.g., red brick walls, railway tracks, steel structures) and intangible qualities (e.g., nostalgia, identity, historical resonance) that are crucial to Ma'anshan's collective memory.

The project contributes to the theoretical discourse on urban memory by extending it into the realm of contemporary visual art practice. Drawing from theories of collective memory, place attachment, and spatial identity, it introduces a framework in which painting acts as a cognitive and emotional bridge between past industrial functions and present urban culture. By integrating memory studies with aesthetic theory, the research reinforces the idea that post-industrial landscapes are not merely remnants of history but active agents in shaping collective consciousness and visual culture.

In the specific context of Ma'anshan**,** a city shaped by steel and industrial development, this project offers an important localized narrative within the broader theme of urban transformation. It contextualizes urban spaces as living archives, blending social memory with evolving commercial uses. The juxtaposition of historical structures and modern urban life depicted in the artworks provides a unique lens through which Ma'anshan's evolving identity can be understood and appreciated.

Practically, the project expands the methodology of contemporary painting by incorporating semi-abstract compositions, collage techniques, and site-specific memory extraction**.** It demonstrates how artists can visually archive urban change and stimulate public engagement with urban heritage. The body of work can serve as a model for public art installations, gallery exhibitions, and urban design consultation, offering a way to visually preserve and interpret urban memory in cities undergoing rapid transformation. This makes the project relevant to artists, educators, urban planners, and cultural policymakers alike.

In conclusion, this project reinforces the importance of artistic intervention in preserving cultural memory in urban spaces. It advocates for aesthetic strategies that keep history visible, ensuring that the spirit of place remains embedded in the evolving fabric of the city.

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