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ARTS PREVIEW VANESSA WONG | vanessa.wong@scmp.com

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David Boyce says "everybody is a sort of amalgam of what they've seen, what they've been taught ... and what they've experienced".

Photo: Jonathan Wong

FROM THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS Blindspot Gallery

One of the things that interests David Boyce about Chinese painting is the apprenticeship concept of copying a master's work.

The Hong Kong-based New Zealand photographer explains that students have to replicate works over and over again until they're just as good as their mentor's. It is only then that they can start doing their own work, which often involves making only minor changes so the pieces will still feature the master's influence.

"That's something not taught a lot in Western art – just how much artists are influenced by other artists – because people keep talking about originality," says Boyce, who learned about the traditional art form after relocating to Hong Kong eight years ago. "There's the cult of

originality in art, but no matter how you look at it, everything is a step from something that has been before. Everybody is a sort of amalgam of what they've seen, what they've been taught, what they've heard and what they've experienced."

Boyce's latest show explores the idea of how artists are influenced by their predecessors and the concept of originality. Its title, "From the Shoulders of Giants", references the Greek myth about a dwarf who guides the blind Orion to Helios, while also echoing what Isaac Newton once wrote – "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants" – of his advancements in science.

The "Giants" in Boyce's series of self-portraits – each created using a combination of projection, make-up, painting, and manipulation of images to pay homage to a work and its artist – consist of both famous and obscure figures who have influenced Boyce.

While it is easy to spot the shadows of Vincent van Gogh, French painter Gustave Courbet and mainland artist Ai Weiwei in some of the works, Boyce prefers not to point out the less obvious ones.

"I don't identify each individual one because I think it's important that people need to think about what they're looking at and who these influences are," he says.

It can be a fun – or desperate – exercise trying to figure out the stories behind each piece. But if Boyce happens to be in the gallery, and you press hard enough, he may just give you some hints to guide you through. He did spill the beans about *Untitled 22*, in his words, a "photograph within a photograph", although I'm not allowed to disclose it.

Blindspot Gallery, 24-26A, Aberdeen Street, Central, Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-7pm. Ends December 21. Inquiries: 2517 6238