

Kitsch is important because skill, this unnecessary encumbrance which prevents Art and the artist in their attempt to express, has been washed away together with the earnest, human expression. Skill is simply one of the most important criteria in judging whether something is or isn't kitsch. I understood this fully upon reading Tomas Kulka. He cited a hypothetical example involving two identical versions of a typical kitsch motif: a sunset, where one version is a photograph and the other, a painting. He was told, when he presented this cognitive experiment, that the painting was the most «kitchy». The reason for this, he explained, was that the photograph was «more true to nature» and also a mechanical production.<sup>9</sup> The crux of the matter, in other words, is the personal intention which lies in the painting, along with skill. One might change the title of Ortega's essay to «The Expulsion of Talent from Art». In the German art magazine, *art*, this was made clear: skill as a quality is a bourgeois method of judging art.

My final point deals with the rather incorrect common understanding of kitsch as being poorly-made, mass-produced paintings and Mickey Mouse watches.

When Hermann Broch and Clement Greenberg wrote their polemics during the 1930s, kitsch was a real threat to serious, artistic expression, in the wake of art's severance from kitsch values. Kitsch is, according to them, reactionary and without moral responsibility for the development of art. The goal of art is prospective, and as long as an artist has this goal in mind, he is working «well». The kitsch-creator, on the other hand, is regressive. He trips up art by utilizing artwork of the past as his foundation. He works with «beauty». The goal of this Satan in the value system of art, is to grab hold of human fervency with the most successful effects. Kitsch is what tricked innocent avant-garde artists into giving in to easy profit. Therefore, it had to be destroyed so that it would never again pose a threat to pure art.

Matei Calinescu and Tomas Kulka, on the other hand, wrote their essays in the late 80s and early 90s after modernism had already established itself as the dominant form of expression in the art world. We no longer live in an age of struggle where modernistic values must be secured. The focus now is on mass-production and reproduction of figurative work. The concept of kitsch has become a subject for the sociological study of bad taste. Everything from plastic tulips and small,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 78

painted porcelain sculptures to the poorly painted crying child, is incorporated by this concept. By «kitsch», one refers to things that have been bought in the understanding that they are either esthetically valuable as home décor, or because one actually believes that they are art. In both cases, these products are purchased in order to beautify one's life, as Calinescu correctly states. For Tomas Kulka, kitsch has become an easy way to escape everyday life – a «transparent symbol» – which he explains thus: the picture of the crying child might just as well be substituted with the *words* crying child, because the goal lies in the emotion that is to be achieved, and not in the image itself.<sup>10</sup> Kitsch is digested emotion. In his essay, Calinescu considers kitsch «one of the most direct manifestations of the triumphant aesthetics and ethics of consumerism».<sup>11</sup> The cultural industry exists in order to produce what the consumer wants. It was during the 1930s that the term «cultural industry» was coined by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. It was additionally referred to as the enjoyment industry or entertainment industry. The cultural industry supplies the pseudo-cultural market with relaxation products designed to satisfy the recreational need of the masses.

Even though Greenberg also refers to kitsch as mass-culture, the aversion to the interest in learning from the past is much stronger and more serious. Forty years have gone by since kitsch was accepted as an artistic effect. By this I mean kitsch in the sense of camp, such as I described it earlier.

The sensual, skin-rendering painting has now been given a big chance. A classical figurative painter has finally avoided that tragic trap many have been caught by – namely to attack and ridicule modernism out of the conviction that «we are the true artists». It cannot be emphasized more strongly that kitsch does not represent a battle against modernism, but rather, an attempt to create something.

Through Kitsch one could obtain respect for working with what in Art has been seen as «the pathetically human».

What is needed now, for this sensual painting, is a superstructure, so that the established art world, composed of curators, art historians and artists, will not simply reject a classical figurative painting as «something old», but value it for what it is, according to its own criteria and pretensions.

<sup>11</sup> M. Calinescu: op. cit. p. 247