

My friend Tone Nyaas (female Art historian) curated a retrospective show of the painter Charles Roka, who just recently died. He was known for his half-naked, "kitschy" gipsy girls. The article I replied to with the following text, was printed by Aftenposten's other Art critic, Lotte Sandberg. In her article, Sandberg comments on Roka to some extent, falsily claiming his prizes have risen, presumably because Kitsch has become so popular. Then, of course, she claims that contemporary artists' comments on Kitsch are in themselves Kitsch. Also a false claim. One of the defining characteristics of Kitsch is its total rejection of irony. To comment Kitschvalues is to say: "I know this is what most people like, but I am only studying it, not endorsing it".

On Kitsch.

Kitsch is a phenomenon which has set roots in the Norwegian cultural debate, and it seems that exhibitions of like that Kitschpainter Roka, curated by Tone Nyaas at the Haugar Museum, help in manifesting this.

In her article "What is Kitsch?" in Aftenposten 09.08.03, Lotte Sandberg talks about the painter Roka and also the "investigations" by contemporary artists into classical Kitschvalues. I find it appropriate to give a short comment on this, considering the title of her article.

With the different Kitsch critics, there are two aspects that stand out as far as the mentality of Kitsch is concerned: Kitsch always wants to be serious, and it talks about each individual's quest for happiness. Kitsch is a meeting with your longings, memories and desires – and therefore it is never ironic. When contemporary artists play their distanced play with Kitsch it is pure Art. Why? Because the impersonal is an Artvalue, as we can see in Jeff Koons' superficially rendered figures ("Bubbles", for example), or earlier in the figures of Matisse. The "typical" aspects of a "typical" Kitsch painting (The Crying Child) are in reality typical Art elements. Just look at the (way) too big eyes or the unnatural skin. These are Art elements exactly because they are unnatural, that is: they do not appear living. Further, many mistakingly refer to these paintings as "sentimental" – an improper use of the term because the reason for our laughs is that these paintings are not sentimental (i.e. "emotional") *enough*. The commenting function of contemporary artists, referred to by Sandberg, consequently makes their "detective"-work all the more Art. This is because Art focuses on discussing social or sociological issues, while Kitsch is a continuation of the aristotelic mimesis-idea of a work as a synthesis of reality based on rational handcraft.

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