

# **Evaluation of Kitsch Art in A Consumer Society**

## **By The Art Educators**

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## **Abstract**

Kitsch, like many art concepts, went beyond the boundaries of art and began to affect individuals and society. In consumer society, many imitations, cheap, serial, fake products and repetitions of their have been proliferated. With its lack of artistic concern, creativity and originality, kitsch products have caused art to lose its autonomy and enter into a commercial configuration. In this study, a survey study was conducted to reach art educators' opinions about Kitsch products. Educators working in various departments of Fine Arts Faculties were emailed and asked if they agreed with the study opinion. It was considered that the most important points of the literature review were utilized to develop survey questions, which included demographic questions and propositions. According to the questionnaire responses, all of the educators regard kitsch as an industrial object for decorative purpose that is aesthetically deficient and entertaining to society. However, this study show that, while the great majority of faculty members do not purchase kitsch objects, a significant proportion of them argue that not all bad art should be labeled as kitsch. According to this study, which supports literature review, art educators are concerned about the rising consumption of kitsch items, as well as the commercialization of art, creativity, and uniqueness, and its service to capitalism. In the survey findings, different outcomes were obtained based on age groupings. Participants were indecisive whether kitsch was aesthetically deficient, and no clear conclusions were obtained. While 25 - 35 year olds are indecisive on whether kitsch is art, 36-45 year olds are strongly opposed, while 46-59 year olds are more open to kitsch.

**Keywords:** Consumer culture; Kitsch; Popular culture

## INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, due to capitalism and the commercialization of art, popular culture emerged. This situation has caused to the emergence of non-artistic products and led to the production of works of art with a low level of aesthetic appreciation (Şahin, 2016).

Kitsch, like many art concepts, went beyond the boundaries of art and began to affect individuals and also society. In consumer society, it is seen that many imitations, cheap, serial, fake and effortless design products repeat themselves. With its lack of artistic concern, creativity and originality, kitsch products have caused art to lose its autonomy and enter into a commercial configuration. Kitsch leads to rise in wannabe and copycat items that appeal to the consumer society on a low level, rather than unique and lasting works.

Being an easy, ready-made, easy-to-digest shortcut away from elusive art has been the most important factor in the popularity and spread of kitsch. Kitsch applied for commercial purposes has successfully competed with serious art; advertising agencies and many brands have employed kitsch in their marketing strategies all the time. In other respects, it is seen that old period paintings and sculptures are kitschized with garbling instead of creative and original art in many exhibitions. While kitsch is attractive for many people, the reaction of those who have art education to kitsch has been a matter of curiosity.

As a result, is a work that develops as kitsch regarded fake art, or does it fall into the category of entertaining the consumer society rather than fake art? The aim of this study is to make a conclusion based on the opinions of people who have artistic knowledge.

Kitsch works are considered as confirmation and repetition rather than displaying the unique, destructive, and surprising. These anti-art movements are distinguished by the fact that they do not produce novel works, but rather re-exhibit discarded, waste artifacts of various forms. Along with this movement, renowned curator Bourriaud named this art the Marketplace. Because distinct shapes of all types appear in various forms and artists re-use and present them.

The artists' objective is to reintroduce ready-made objects of various shapes and sizes. They consider all sorts of citations and copying as rightful, and they have no limitations. They disregard the notion of originality; art has died and been consumed. For the artist, beauty has become a tool

rather than a goal. Kitsch objects are the shortest way of art to serve this movement. According to the study results, there is a distinction between kitsch and genuine art objects.

In this study, a survey study was conducted to reach art educators' opinions about Kitsch products. Educators working in various departments of fine arts faculties were emailed and asked if they agreed with the study opinion. To collect specific numerical data and to establish a clear conclusion, a quantitative research approach was used. The five-point Likert scale was used to develop options for the questions. It was considered that the most important points of the literature review were utilized to develop survey questions, which included demographic questions and propositions.

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## RESULTS

In the first part of the survey, it is aimed to reach the demographic characteristics of the participants. As mentioned previously, the participants consist of faculty members who give art education in the Fine Arts Faculties. In the second part of the survey, the statements about kitsch are asked to respondents.

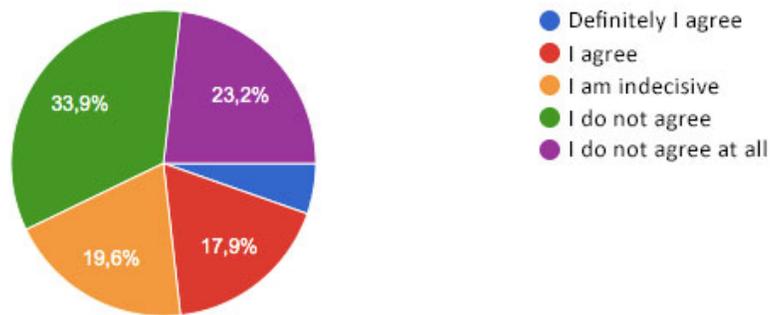


Figure A: *The graphics about statement of 'Kitsch is an art in itself'. (n=56)*

While the matter of debate whether kitsch is art or not was raised, 17.9 % responded that they agreed with this statement. 32 people disagreed. There was a 34.8 percent difference between those who agreed and those who disagreed. The responses support the literature review. On the other hand, 75 % respondents believe that kitsch boosts unqualified production, while just 16.1% disagree. According to the survey results, those who view kitsch is not art are between the ages of 36 and 45, and the majority of those who say it is art are between the ages of 46-59.

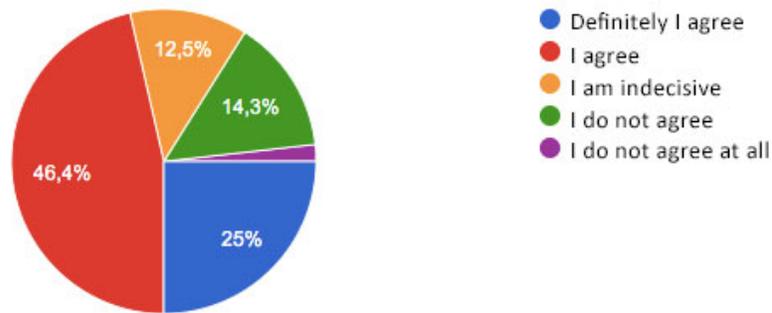


Figure B :The graphics about the statement of ‘I am concerned that, as kitsch product consumption rises, art, creativity, and uniqueness will be commercialized’. (n=56)

Various copies of kitsch have been seen in various art media such as many popular, commercial art, literature, magazine covers, illustrations, advertisements, coated (art) paper magazines and comic strips. Greenberg (1939), the art critic, has rejected kitsch for these reasons and describes Kitsch as unpleasant and poor taste. It solely asks for money from clients. Therefore, it is capitalized in exchange for an investment. While 71.4% of participants were concerned about the increase in kitsch works, 16.1% said kitsch objects were not in a creative position. A lot of the participants who supported this proposition were 36-45 years old and their answers supported the literature research.

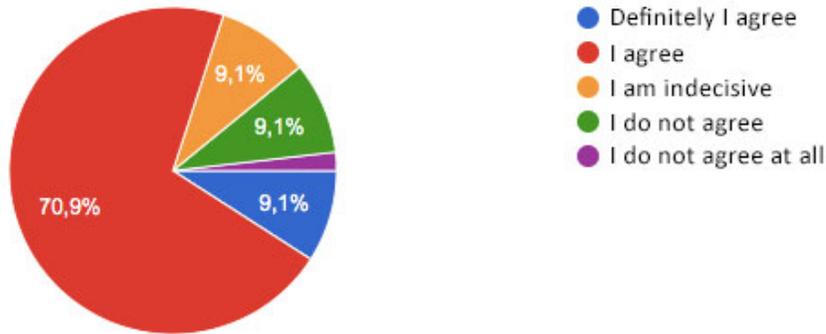


Figure C: The graphics about the statement of 'Modernization has made it necessary to change the consumer culture'. (n=55)

There is a fairly obvious result here. With the expansion of production areas, it has become necessary to alter the consumer culture. This divergence in modern society has become a movement, breaking away from traditional foundations and stasis. With industrialization, there has been a fast shift from production to consumption. The great majority of respondents believe that modernisation necessitates a shift in consumer culture. The majority age range of the educators who stated that they agreed with the opinion in the survey is 36-45.

## DISCUSSION

Art is a type of conveyance, a situation in which something is given to its audience. Works that have a detrimental impact on people are considered bad art or non-art. The content and expressive power of real artworks are intense. Emotions are accurately conveyed to the audience. In order for art to be art, its content must be important, convey the spiritual feeling and be instructive (Büyükdüvenci, 2006). Even if the instructors participating in the study find the art of kitsch bad, not all their bad arts are called kitsch. From this it reveals that aesthetic feeling and objective beauty must be separated from each other. According to Kulka (1992), kitsch is not equivalent to bad art. Just as high art can be kitsch, not every bad art should be defined as kitsch. Kitsch emerged for a commercial purpose and competes with real art.

All production in modern capitalism, according to Adorno(1960), is for the market. Many things are manufactured not to meet the needs of people, but to maximize profit and capital. What distinguishes capitalist economies is that commerce rather than usage is universal. A strict approach to defending high art and culture is based on the identification of culture, and this approach causes culture to maintain its economic status. According to the literature review, the most important factors in the dissemination of the notion of kitsch are cultural inadequacies and the economic, political, and commercial predisposition of the industrializing society to the concept of kitsch. The items we use in our everyday lives are altered somewhat from their natural state and sold in the market for a profit. As a result, kitsch objects with unknown creators emerge.

With the expansion of production regions, it has become necessary, as noted in the literature research, to transform the consumer culture. Kitsch is viewed as a concept that reflects objects that may be purchased inexpensively in modern society. This divergence in modern society has become a movement, breaking away from traditional foundations and stasis. With industrialization, there has been a fast shift from production to consumption. Society's consumer culture is disseminated not just in apparel and home decoration, but also in a wide range of areas such as leisure and sports activities, mainstream music genres, and video. Hence, the production of low-cost items that are easily available to everyone has increased. The great majority of art-educator participants stated that modernity necessitates changing the consumer culture.

Kitsch is defined by cheapness, imitation, meaningless wannable, vulgar expressiveness, technical and aesthetic inadequacies. With its easy and clear vocabulary that emphasizes on quick consumption, mass and popular culture, it is now visible in many industries, media, and advertising products. It is the opposite of art, yet it may also be considered pseudo-art. Instead of genuine artistic endeavors, simple and superficial works are created (Yılmaz, 2011). Kitsch is a vulgar and fake notion that has no aesthetic value, does not fatigue people, and attempts every possible means to sell in the shortest way. Kitsch, according to Artun (2011), is a drive toward absolute consumption. That is why kitsch and art are diametrically opposed. Each artwork may be perceived as kitsch, and every work of kitsch can be seen as art. Each may differ depending on its cultural climate. Kitsch as an aesthetic category has no relevance in this context. The survey findings also support the notion that kitsch is not an art form in and of itself.

## CONCLUSION

This study intends to make a conclusion based on the opinions of educators who have received academic background and also teach art. While kitsch may be fascinating and appealing to those who have not received an art education and do not have aesthetic eyes, it is not so for those who are involved with art and whose goal is to create original works. According to the questionnaire responses, all of the educators regard kitsch as an industrial object for decorative purpose that is aesthetically deficient and entertaining to society.

The survey findings are limited to 56 people. Face-to-face meetings have been unable to hold since the study's beginning owing to the global epidemic. A survey was sent to the e-mail addresses obtained by searching the university websites. However, few people and data were reached in this manner. The targeted number was not met in the survey conducted by e-mail, with just 56 responses received from 428 people. Further studies may conduct a collaborative study of all universities with a broader reach; face to face interviews can be used to gather more data. Few questions were asked in the survey in order to promote faculty members' involvement and not to bother them with too many questions. Face-to-face interviews allow for faster access to specific information, more questions, and can be more useful for further studies. In addition, the studies will be conducted should not only work with people who give art instruction, but also with people who have diverse interests and think kitsch is interesting, and their thoughts should be examined. However, studies show that, while the great majority of faculty members do not purchase kitsch objects, a significant proportion of them argue that not all bad art should be labeled as kitsch. According to this study, art educators are concerned about the rising consumption of kitsch items, as well as the commercialization of art, creativity, and uniqueness, and its service to capitalism. In the survey findings, different outcomes were obtained based on age groupings. Participants were indecisive whether kitsch was aesthetically deficient, and no clear conclusions were obtained. While 25 - 35 year olds are indecisive on whether kitsch is art, 36-45 year olds are strongly opposed, while 49-59 year olds are more open to kitsch. Based on this, the results of the survey support this study. art educators are undecided about whether kitsch is art and no clear conclusion has been reached.

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