
KOEN
between and
KITSCH

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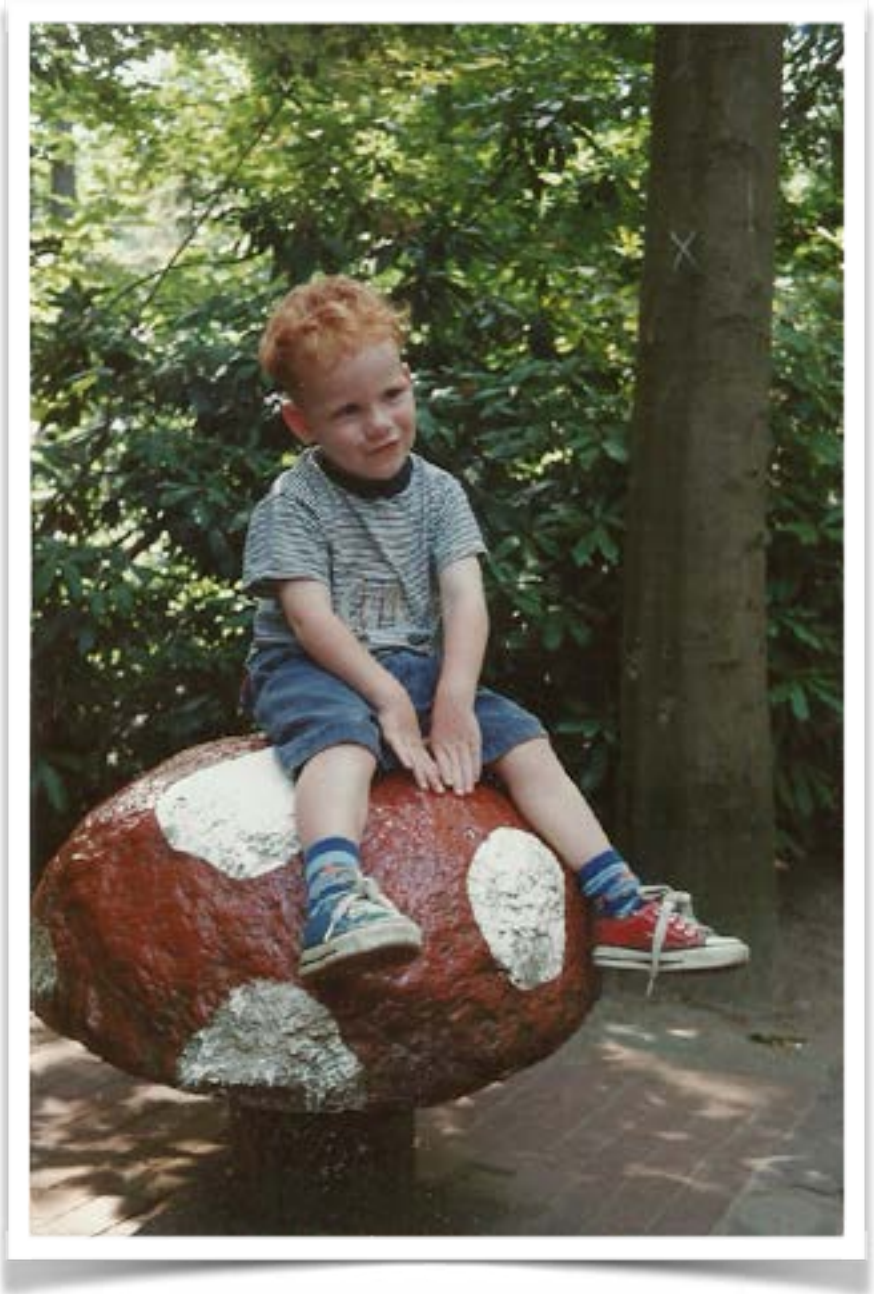

Summer 1992, Efteling, Koen 3 years old

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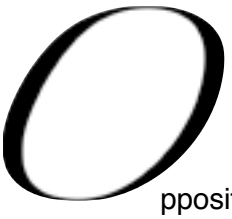 pposites.

Trained as a traditional Gold- and Silversmith I learned to see jewellery as beautiful body decorations. Jewellery, as a form of adornment which directly refers to an aim to increase beauty. But my whole perspective changed completely after I was introduced to the world of contemporary jewellery. Jewellery as art, with a concept, a meaning, an emotion. A new approach towards jewellery where cheap materials seem to be the standard and precious metals and gemstones a taboo. Since I was always inspired by the beauty of nature, a teacher, Ruudt Peters, gave me an assignment to work from the opposite; to make *99 ugly flowers*. It became a huge eye opener for me. I learned that even by working with the concept of ugliness, I can create beauty; but a more interesting one.

Still I'm fascinated about opposites and the tension in between contradicting values, such as beauty and ugliness. I believe one is not better than the other, but they strengthen each other. Somewhere in this tension-field lies kitsch. I see kitsch like a 'guilty pleasure', people enjoy and love it, despite the feeling that it is not generally accepted as good taste.

When I started at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, for the first time my work was associated with kitsch. Rutger Emmelkamp, the head of the jewellery department, asked me to do some research. I didn't understand this connection, but later on I thought it was a certain kind of material and colour use. Like the common understanding of it, I associated kitsch in a very negative way, such as the ugly, cheap porcelain souvenirs in my grandparents house. When I watched the popular Dutch television program '*Tussen Kunst en Kitsch*' (Between Art and Kitsch), it sounded so easy to understand the meaning of kitsch. Art is unique and valuable and kitsch is a knickknack, counterfeit and worthless. In general when we talk about kitsch we use the term in a negative way.

The Oxford dictionary explains kitsch as: "art, objects, or design considered to be in poor taste because of excessive garishness or sentimentality, but sometimes appreciated in an ironic or knowing way: *the lava lamp is a bizarre example of sixties kitsch".*

The term kitsch most likely originated in Munich around 1860-70, when the avant-garde started to criticise the upcoming mass culture with its tasteless, cheap, popular and commercial pictures and sketches. Another definition is linked to trash: Umberto Eco writes “the dialect of Mecklenburg already had a verb *kitschen*, which meant to collect mud from the street and there is also the verb *verkitschen* meaning to sell cheaply.”[1] So kitsch could be said to mean something like “artistic rubbish”.

Since kitsch is surrounded by strong preconceptions I think it’s important to look beyond the aesthetics. What makes something really kitsch and why? A book which was an important eye-opener for me was: *The Artificial Kingdom, a treasury of the kitsch experience,* by Celeste Olalquiaga. She describes the strong feature of kitsch to re-create experiences that only exist in our memories or fantasies.

In my thesis I will mainly focus on 19th century Europe, but in order to substantiate my story, I will jump to other specific moments in history as well. In the first chapter I will research the background of kitsch and challenge the preconception of kitsch being an expression of bad taste and the opposite of art. Then I will explore how kitsch functions and take you into the rich world of the kitsch fantasy. Finally I will look at the link between kitsch and jewellery. What do they have in common?

[1] Eco, U., *On Ugliness*, Maclehose Press, Quercus, 2011, page 394.

Chapter 1

Misconceptions of kitsch

1.1 Judgment of taste

When I think about kitsch, I think of this Dutch garden in my neighbourhood—with bright coloured flowers, plastic gnomes and miniature windmills—the shiny golden tea set of my grandmother, lavishly displayed on a rococo cabinet, and of cheap porcelain figurines and ugly souvenirs. The term kitsch is often (mis) used to express a judgement of bad taste, a judgement based on aesthetics, a term which is derived from *aithesis*, the Greek word for sensation or perception.[1] So it is a judgement based on our ability to distinguish qualities at a sensory level, when we look at, feel or smell a piece. But who decides what is a good and a bad taste?

To understand the concept of the judgement of taste, first it's important to explain a radical cultural change in society which started at the end of the 18th century with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. Before, manufacturing was done at a small scale and usually in people's homes, but now mass production was possible due to the introduction of specialised machinery and large factories. The Industrial Revolution caused changes in almost every aspect of daily life and "for the first time in history, the living standards of the masses of ordinary people have begun to undergo sustained growth."[2] A new group of people gained more influence in society — the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie had a different taste and also required another kind of art than usually commissioned by the nobility and churches. Historically the judgement of taste was somehow connected to moral values, defined by religion or faith and was used as a manifestation to serve the greater good, formulated by the churches or the reigning political order.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant was one of the first who examined the judgement of taste from the individual spectator.[3] Artists started to make art, for the sake of making art, instead of to express moral believes. So for the first time, artists were not just commissioned by the nobility and churches to create their beauty ideal, but gained a new autonomous position, a position where they

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[1] Freeland, C., *But is it Art?*, Oxford University Press, 2001, page 8.

[2] Lucas, R.E. Jr., *Lectures on Economic Growth,* Harvard University Press, 2002, page 109-10.

[3] Kant, I., *Critique of Judgement*, (1790) EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection.

had the freedom to criticise society and create autonomous art. Autonomous art functions on its own, which also means that you should judge these artworks by tangible qualities such as technical features. This new autonomous way of observing meant that you had the freedom to make up your own thoughts and interpretation besides what the artist meant to express. So from the 19th century onwards, the imposed judgement of good taste changed and people gained freedom to make their own independent judgements. And thus notions of 'bad taste' and 'kitsch' begin to appear, something which most likely didn't exist in this sense, in a dialectical relationship to judgement, before this time.

The ability to observe the world around us, is a human gift. We call something beautiful when it contributes to our inner harmony and when it evokes enjoyment and pleasure. Looking at art, Kant believes some works are objectively better than others. "He aimed to show that good judgements in aesthetics are grounded in features of artworks themselves, not just in us and our preferences."[1]

To understand Kant's concept of beauty we have to ignore our personal preferences so we can purely focus on the objective features and qualities. For example if I look at a painting of a coral reef, I cannot objectively describe it as beautiful when the image actually evokes a desire in me to travel to a distant tropical island and go snorkelling again. My desire has influenced my judgement to describe it as beautiful. The term kitsch and the idea of bad taste originated in the time when people were allowed to make their own individual judgements. So somehow we cannot separate a good from a bad taste and art from rubbish, without a personal interest. Everybody has a different view of the world and when I describe something as tasteless and ugly, I most likely say this in relation to my own perspective of a good taste. Hereby I'm influenced by my own culture, surrounding and education. Meanwhile, despite all negative associations, kitsch is popular with large parts of the population.

According to Kant's idea kitsch can be explained in two ways; 1) Kitsch is a good work of art, because many people gain pleasure and enjoyment from it or 2) all people who love kitsch cannot separate their personal interest from independent qualities. In other words good art requires qualities superior to man. Bad art can evoke a similar kind of pleasure as good art, but this pleasure is not originated from the qualities of the piece, but the result of desires and memories of such a situation.

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[1] Freeland, C., *But is it Art?*, Oxford University Press, 2002, page 10.

1.2 Revision of the classic beauty ideal

"The goddess of beauty is the goddess of kitsch."[1] Generally speaking beauty seems to be something of a taboo in the fine-art scene, while kitsch celebrates this feature. The ideology of kitsch artists is to create masterpieces. They glorify refined craft skills and the classic beauty ideal such as equalled by the Greek, Romans and artists of the Renaissance. To examine the preconception of kitsch being an expression of a bad taste, I will give a new perspective towards the European classic beauty ideal.

During my study in Florence, Italy, I was for the first time confronted with the border between real and fake. I admired sculptures like Michelangelo's David in front of *Palazzo Vecchio*, the richly decorated facade of *Duomo* and the famous gilded bronze doors of the *Baptistery*. Later on I found out I was looking at fake copies and I felt cheated. How can I trust what I see? The originals were removed to the museums, to preserve for the future. So the border between real and fake became blurry and we can't make anymore the distinction between the original and recreation. But does it really matter?

When I look at Florence's most famous sculpture Michelangelo's David, I have seen the original and three life size recreations. To come back to Kant's concept of a pure aesthetic judgement, we have to ignore our own preferences so we can purely focus on the present features and qualities. To be honest I cannot make a neutral judgment anymore, since the sculpture has become a remembrance of the good time I had while living in Florence. But still I remember my first impressions. When I saw the original David in *Academia Galleria* I was impressed by all refined details and amazed by its size, which looked much bigger compare to the recreations. But somehow the novelty was gone, since the first David I saw was the recreation in front of *Palazzo Vecchio*, the original location of the sculpture. So the original David is magical because of the perfection and refinement created by Michelangelo as the sculptor and the recreation felt equally meaningful because of the original surrounding of the sculpture. When I exited the museum I was surprised by another David, which added a new perspective. This recreation made me laugh and attracted my attention, because it was full coloured in a pink human skin tone, with orange hair. This sculpture reminded me of kitsch aesthetically speaking, but also by the way it was used, as decor for a nice picture. Interesting to me was the fact that many people payed attention to this sculpture, even though they had just visited the beloved original one. Especially the colours were disturbing to me, so even bigger was the surprise when I read about the discovery of coloured sculptures in antiquity.

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[1] Broch, H., Essay: *Notes on the problem of kitsch*, in G. Dorfles *Kitsch an anthology of bad taste*, Studio Vista London, 1969, page 59.

24th of Dec. 2013
Michelangelo's David,
all pink and blond,
by Hans-Peter Feldmann,
Art returns to Art exhibition,
Accademia Gallery, Florence

What I experienced in Florence, was the norm of mainly white marble sculptures. “Artists in the 16th century took bare stone at face value knowing no better. Michelangelo and others emulated what they believed to be the ancient aesthetic, leaving the stone of most of their statues its natural colour. Thus they helped pave the way for neo-Classicism, the lily-white style that this day remains our paradigm for Greek art.”[1] So it’s an interesting idea that Renaissance artists gave us a misconception of the classic beauty ideal, with their copied interpretations. Already in their time, the colours of the original Greek sculptures were faded, because of intense exposure to weather elements or due to having been buried and too much scrubbed after recovery.
Archaeologist Vinzenz Brinkmann presented the results of his extensive research, based on earlier works by Volkmar von Graeve, in a traveling exhibition called: *Gods in Color - the polychromie of ancient sculpture*.[2] Greek temples and sculptures were once painted in brilliant colours. Brinkmann based his reconstructions on scientific analysis. By using ultraviolet light he revealed so called ‘*colour shadows*’ of pigments. These are differences in the surface of the marble sculptures caused by the minerals of the used pigments and the difference in permanence. Places where pigments wore off more quickly, also erode in a different way and provide an idea of the original patterns.[3] The sculptures in the exhibition were 3-D scanned reproductions, carefully painted using natural pigments. The reproductions are only painted where colour evidence was found, the remaining parts generally left white. Sometimes evidence of colour contrasts can be interpreted in two different ways and in these cases the exhibition featured both. For example the Cuirass-Torso from the Acropolis in Athens where armour is gold plated in one version and yellow in another. Classic white marble sculptures easily look cold and lifeless. For the Greeks their gods were living figures

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[1] Gurewitsch, M., *True Colors*, Smithsonian Magazine, Vol. 36, No. 11, July 2008, page 66.

[2] Bunte Götter – Die Farbigkeit antiker Skulptur, Glyptothek museum, Munich 2003.

[3] Reed, C., *Dazzlers - Ancients roborn in bright array*, Harvard magazine, Vol. 110, No. 2, 2007, page 32-34.

Left: original Augustus of Prima Porta (Vatican museum), on the right painted replica

and colour emphasised that. Archeologist Brinkmann said: “Vitality is what the Greeks were after and the charge of the erotic. They always found ways to emphasise the power and beauty of the naked body. Dressing this torso and giving it colour was a way to make the body sexier.”[1]
The reason I bring in this example is to show how blurry the line is between real and fake and between what we consider beautiful and ugly. Our judgement of taste just tells something about the perspective we take, about how we see and experience the world.

[1] Gurewitsch, M., *True Colors*, Smithsonian Magazine, Vol. 36, No. 11, July 2008, page 66.

Greek Cuirass-Torso of a warrior, (Acropolis Museum), colours of the cuirass are speculative, but there is proof some of the ancient sculptures were even gilded.

Aesthetically the bright coloured marble sculptures can easily be labelled kitsch from a contemporary perspective, but only because we learned to see classic antiquity in a different way. This proves to me that we cannot rely on our aesthetic judgement of taste when looking at kitsch. What if the coloured Greek and Roman sculptures would have been better preserved? Then the recreations by Renaissance artists would have been painted too and painted sculptures would have become the norm for the classic beauty ideal. The same is applicable to kitsch. We have a preconceived view on kitsch, knowing no better. If our judgement criteria in art were different, kitsch might not be labeled as such.

1.3 Clement Greenberg: avant-garde and kitsch

"Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time."[1] Clement Greenberg wrote a very critical and influential essay in 1939 were he distinguished art and kitsch as opposites.

Greenberg describes kitsch as a product of the industrial revolution, specially produced to fit the taste of the new class in society: the bourgeoisie. At the same time there was a movement opposing the accepted norms and trying to push the boundaries between the maker and consumer: the avant-garde. They fulfilled a critical position in society and their aim was to achieve progress and to keep culture moving. Their art was considered daring and controversial. To me it feels outdated and no longer acceptable to make a hierarchy in art like Greenberg did in his essay. How can we still use the term kitsch to distinguish art from craft or art from rubbish? Can we make this distinction at all? Artists are searching their whole life for the reason why they make art and they try to define their own definition. In addition we have to consider the wide variety of people living on this planet and all the different ways that we look at our world. Art is not just something for a small elite group, but it comes in variations to serve all of us. Greenberg's perspective towards kitsch becomes clear in another controversial statement where he connects kitsch to academic art.[2] After a closer look I do see an interesting link between both, but from a positive side. The origins of academic art go back to the Renaissance when artists gained a autonomous position, instead of just being a craftsman. The first European art academies were established, to set a standard for qualifying as an an artist and it was a great prestige to belong to this group. Now artists were trained in a wide range of disciplines, ranging from painting, sculpture and architecture to art history, literature and science and because of this multidisciplinary knowledge they acquired the status of a genius.[3]

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[1] Greenberg, C., *Avant-Garde and Kitsch,* in Art and Culture critical essays, Beacon Press, 1961, page 10.

[2] Ibid., page 11.

[3] Welman, H.W. and de Jongh, A.E., *Kunstgeschiedenis*, Vakschool Schoonhoven, 2008, page 83, translated by the author.

In my view this once highly appreciated academic art-form and kitsch have two important elements in common in their themes and working methods: sentimentalism and copying. Both academic art and kitsch are blamed for copying without criticism and for the absence of personal additions. But after researching their working attitude the contrary was proved. Students at the academies were trained to observe and copy classical sculptures in order to master their skills and understand the classical proportions and dimensions. Thus the copying was actually an educational process. Kitsch and academic artists strive for perfection in their aim to recreate the ideal beauty and to create new masterpieces.

The second common element is sentimentalism. Especially because of 19th century industrialism people's everyday life became less pleasant and unspoiled nature came under pressure. People aimed to escape into their dreams of a better life in the past. Academic art and kitsch are influenced by this particular time period in their emphasis on emotions of the individual. They glorify mythology, allegorical subjects, important historical events, as well as unspoiled nature, exotic cultures, fantasy and dreams. Because of the used themes and the representation of the pure and ideal version of life, their work feels sometimes far away from reality. Kitsch and academic art can also be innovative. There are some highly appreciated artists who copy from historical style periods, work with sentimentalism and criticise society. An example is the American artist Kehinde Wiley who obviously paints in the conventions of traditional European portraiture, but replaces the white aristocrats with contemporary black African American men and women thereby raising questions about race, gender and politics.[1] Often strangers from the street are portrayed, who wear clothes associated with hip-hop culture. "Wiley's backgrounds compete with his subjects to command the most attention, though neither overpowers the other. With their growing vines, blooming flowers and Rococo-influenced doily patterns, it's as if the surrounding world rises to celebrate the people in focus.

[1] Wiley, K., http://kehindewiley.com/works/a-new-republic/, November, 2016.

Kehinde Wiley, Napoleon Leading the Army Over the Alps, 2006

But this balance is intentional, a technique to make his work comprehensive."[1] Kitsch is a term that has been abused to separate a good from a bad taste and art from rubbish. Over the last decades, artists have pushed the boundaries to limits of taste. Even the greatest works of art can be rubbish and embrace bad taste in their appearance, so we cannot rely on aesthetics. We should stop making hierarchies in art. Art has always changed through the centuries and this development will continue. In addition it becomes increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between the different disciplines, since they're all blurring. There are artists whose work has associations with fashion or designers who work together with scientists for example.

[1] Magdaleno, J., *A Sprawling Retrospective for Kehinde Wiley's Heroic Portraits*, http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/19/kehinde-wiley-retrospective-brooklyn-museum/, November, 2016.

Chapter 2

The Kingdom of kitsch

2.1 Souvenirs

"The world of kitsch is a world of make-believe, of permanent childhood, in which every day is Christmas. In such a world, death does not really happen.

The loved one is therefore reprocessed, endowed with a sham immortality; he only pretends to die, and we only pretend to mourn him."[1] This quote by philosopher Roger Scruton reveals an important connection between kitsch and the world of the fake. Kitsch tries to walk away from harsh reality, into a pleasant, sweet realm which can only exist in dreams. In this chapter I will dive into the rich world of the kitsch fantasy and explain how kitsch functions in society.

I enter a random Dutch souvenir shop and I see Delft blue porcelain figurines, wooden shoes and tulips, post-cards, T-shirts, bags, coffee mugs and so on. Kitsch and souvenirs are strongly connected in most people's view and although I would like to broaden the image of kitsch, souvenirs are a useful tool for illustrating the way that kitsch functions in society. Nowadays most souvenirs are mass produced and despite the strong influence of local cultural traditions, the overall appearance of souvenirs is more or less the same. Therefore the main appeal of souvenirs doesn't lie in the aesthetic appearance, but in the ability to recall a memory. Perhaps unsurprisingly *souvenir* is also the French word for memory.

The essence of kitsch is that it has to do with sentimental memories. Now I see kitsch like a lens, a certain way of looking at the world and in particular about the way that we transform our sensory perception of an experience into memories. Or rather like a filter that leaves out certain elements in this transformation.

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[1] Scruton, R., *Kitsch and the Modern Predicament,* City Journal, winter 1999.

Philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote a theory about two fundamental ways that we perceive events in our life and how these are processed into memories.[1] The first filter leaves out all harsh reality of life, to remember an idealised blue print of an experience and this leads to conscious memories. One of the functions of these idealised memories, is that we can easily recall them to drag us through difficult times. Conscious memories become nostalgic kitsch.[2]
The second filter leaves out only the perception of time, time seems to stand still, and leads to unconscious memories. These memories are focussed on the transience of life and feelings of loss based on the human desire to bring back intangible life, comparable with a mourning widower who tries to hold on to the nice memories of his loved one and therefore does not really continue his own life. Unconscious memories become melancholic kitsch.[3]
People collect objects due to a desire to keep important memories alive and to keep them close. Melancholic Kitsch, just like souvenirs, has the strong ability to recall all those intense personal memories and desires, even though they're not literally visible in the piece.[4] Like a puzzle, kitsch can be seen as fragments who all together tell something about you as a person and your life. Kitsch is the materialisation of your emotions, wishes, dreams and fantasies, but also intense feelings of loss, death and decay. It's a process of allegorisation whereby fragments of your life turn into tangible symbols. Since kitsch is about memories, rather than a certain kind of aesthetics, it can appear in any form. Even a mass produced product can turn into a highly personal and meaningful piece. The only requirement for kitsch to recall memories, is a certain kind of recognisability in such a way that people can connect to it and project their own meaning at the piece. To me the kitsch lens is the ability to read the personal emotional attachment of a piece. So kitsch can be read only by you and the loved ones with whom you share your life. Hereby kitsch can be meaningful to one person, but rubbish to another. For example if I go to a second hand shop, a piece of furniture or clothing can recall a certain kind of feeling or memory to me and is therefore valuable for me, whereas the same piece can be perceived as dusty and rubbish by someone who has no connection to the piece.

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[1] Benjamin, W., *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire and The image of Proust in Illuminations*, Schocken Books, 1968, page 155-200 and 201-15 respectively.

[2] Olalquiaga, C., *The Souvenir in The artificial kingdom*, Pantheon Books, 1998, page 67-79.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

28th of Jan. 2016, Children's graveyard,
Buitenveldert, Amsterdam

Kitsch is so attractive and powerful because it can be anything. When I look at my own house I collect lots of these fragments that are quite random objects but very meaningful to me. I have a special cactus which is a living memory from the year I lived in Florence. I collected a broken piece from a cactus that grew on the top of the hill where Leonardo da Vinci did his flight experiments and despite a period of storage in a dark cupboard, it started to grow.
I collect little shells who bring back feelings of happiness during holidays around the world. I have a pair of cowry shells, which are actually quite common to find on beaches closer to the tropics, but special to me because I found them at the beach in the south of the Netherlands. Most likely they are from the Maldives used as money and came here with a VOC ship in the 17th - 18th century.

Last year when my grandfather passed away I received a pocket watch, which is for several generations in the family and is a special remembrance of my grandfather who was always wearing two watches because he couldn't choose from his beloved collection. I could go on endlessly, but now I assume everybody can think of personal examples of objects who recall important memories in your life.

2.2 The fairytale king

I'm especially interested in nostalgic kitsch, because it can be seen as the materialisation of your wishes, dreams and fantasies. Thereby the word nostalgia not only refers to a longing for a bygone moment of your life, but also to a longing for a place or era you never experienced. So reality and fantasy blur.

One of the best examples of a person who looked through the lens of nostalgic kitsch, is King Ludwig II of Bavaria, also nicknamed *mad King Ludwig II*, *the Fairytale King* and the *King of Kitsch*. At the age 18 his father died unexpectedly and Ludwig had to ascent the throne. He was inexperienced and actually not much interested in ruling the country. When Bavaria and Austria lost the war against Prussia, Ludwig experienced a personal defeat and retreated from public. Partly because of this he created an alternative world in which he could live as the absolute or medieval king of Bavaria.[1] Ludwig recreated the dreams of his childhood, founded on nostalgic feelings for the Middle Ages. But he was also inspired by Eastern culture, such as Moorish architecture and above all he wanted to recreate all the splendour of the French *Sun King* whom he admired. He commissioned Neuschwanstein castle, inspired by Richard Wagner's operas and chose one of the most beautiful locations in the area where he grew up. Besides an architect, Ludwig contracted a set designer who drew his visions on paper. People didn't understand his dreams and extravagant way of living, so they thought he was mentally ill. Who wants to built a knight's castle at the end of the 19th century? Ludwig's life was as tragic as a play. In June 1886, he was certified insane, after increasing financial problems caused by all his construction projects. On top of that, people came across drafts for three more projects; Falkenstein Castle, a Byzantine palace and a Chinese summer palace.[2] Ludwig was arrested and three days later he was found in a lake, drowned together with the psychiatrist who declared him insane. Still it's a mystery what happened.

Already 6 weeks after his death, Neuschwanstein was opened to public and people could decide for themselves: enjoy this submersion into a fairytale or criticise Ludwig's taste. "That Neuschwanstein is an architectural absurdity becomes plain at the first glance: a mishmash of styles and centuries, exaggerated elements awkwardly put together, it manages to look both huge and not big enough because its proportions are so wrong and details so lacking."[3]

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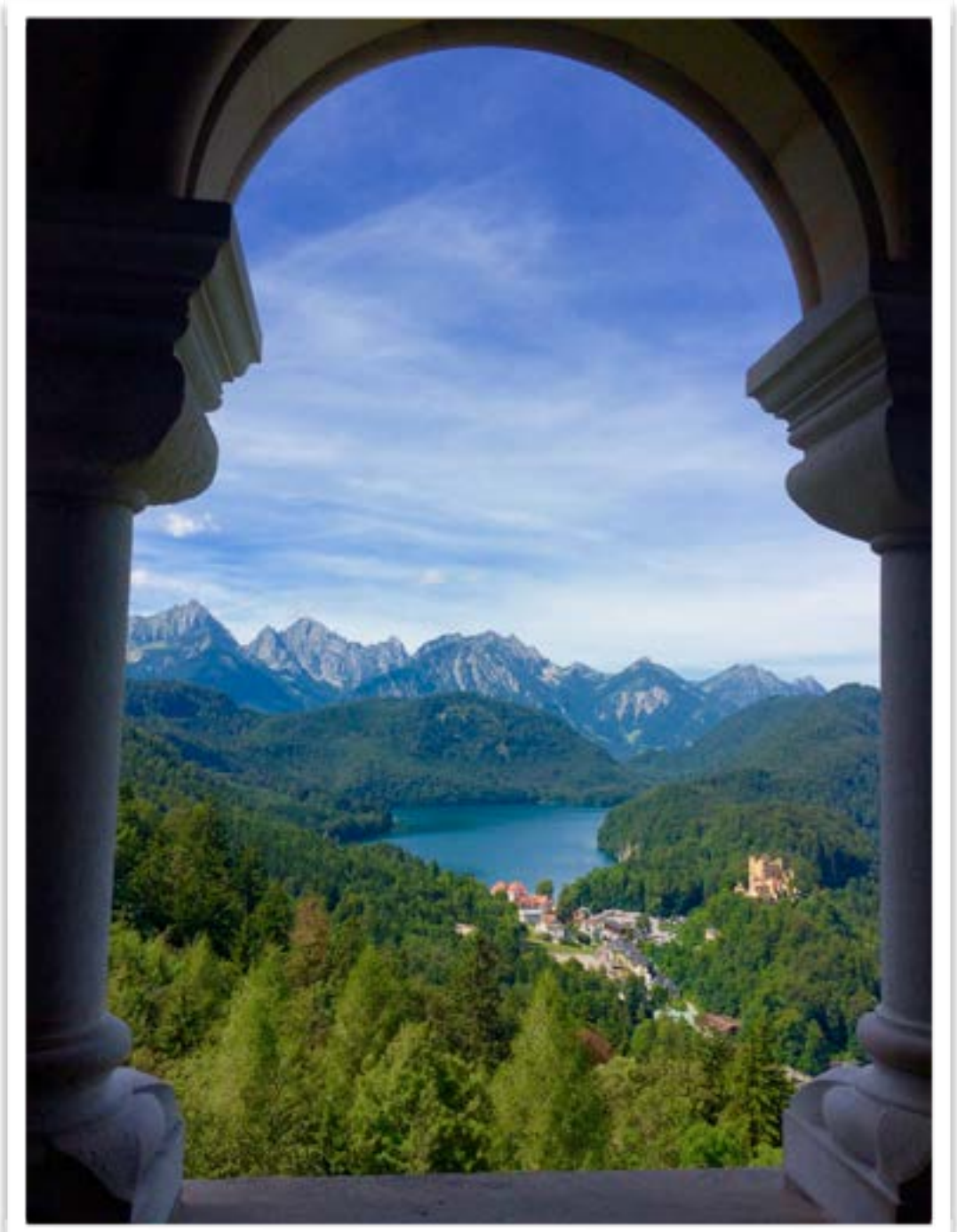
[1] Schatz, U.G., Ulrichs, F., *Neuschwanstein Castle*, Bosch Druck, 2014, page 28.

[2] Ibid., page 86.

[3] Berniero.B., O., *Ludwig's Castles: Forms of Fantasy*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times, April 6, 1986, page 26-27.



3rd of Aug. 2016, 11:28am view from Neuschwanstein Castle

Despite fierce criticism of Ludwig's castle's as an expression of bad taste and as being kitsch, Neuschwanstein became one of Europe's most visited tourist attractions. In summertime up to 10.000 tourists a day visit the castle and during the 2007 selection of the New 7 World Wonders, Neuschwanstein castle finished at place eight.[1] Without knowing it, Ludwig invented the very first Disneyland in the Bavarian Alps. Ironically often tourists associate Neuschwanstein with Disney's *Sleeping Beauty Castle*, but actually it was Walt Disney who drew inspiration from Ludwig's creation.

But why is Neuschwanstein castle considered kitsch? Is it because it is an imitation of a Medieval castle? Or because of its design in which style elements from different centuries are combined? Or because of its huge popularity with tourists who recognise the fairytale castle from their dreams?

First of all "Neuschwanstein suggests that the constructed environment can be viewed as *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total art-work.[2] When you take a visit to the castle you cannot just look from an architectural point of view or through the eyes of a painter or furniture designer. It's about the experience of everything together; the life story of King Ludwig II, together with the castle on top of the hill, overlooking a crystal clear lake and the snowcapped alps. A ravine where a waterfall flows, there is a bridge, which provides the best views towards the castle. But also, consider the whole design of the castle including the materials, floors, walls, paintings, furniture and how these relate to Wagner's operas. All the legends, myths and sagas play a role in the way that the castle originated.

The context is so important in a total art piece, because everything belongs together and stands in relation to each other. A good example is an Art Nouveau interior, where a whole room is completely designed in the same style. For example when a chair leaves the room and through a second hand shop ends up in another interior, it will be out of context. It has lost its original meaning.

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[1] New 7 wonders of the world 2007, world.new7wonders.com, December, 2016.

[2] Edwards, P., *Neuschwanstein or the sorrows of priapus*, Text and Performance Quarterly (online journal), 1999, page 273.

For me the aspect that makes Neuschwanstein kitsch the most, is the strong connection to the life story of Ludwig. It has to do with Ludwig's dream to built a Medieval castle in the 19th century. He romanticised the way of living during the Middle Ages, leaving out the rough parts such as knight wars. I have visited some authentic Medieval castles which always feel huge, a bit cold and uncomfortable to live in, but in comparison Neuschwanstein feels more like a home due to its cosy appearance. It's an idealised version of a Medieval castle in which the historical setting is combined with the latest modern technologies. "Neuschwanstein has a very modern kitchen, hot air heating, and numerous large, tightly-fitting windows with frames made of industrial steel."[1] All floors have running water and automatic flushing systems for the toilets.

Winding staircase, Neuschwanstein Castle

[1] Schatz, U.G., Ulrichs, F., *Neuschwanstein Castle*, Bosch Druck, 2014, page 20.

Christian Jank, project drawing of Neuschwanstein Castle, 1869

Neuschwanstein is a huge decor for a theatre play where Ludwig plays the lead role. Ludwig was a huge fan of Richard Wagner's operas and he recreated the myths, legends and sagas that were told in these performances. When you consider the castle as a huge decor it doesn't really matter whether it matches reality: it's about the experience and the emotions it evokes. So in a way Neuschwanstein castle is a remembrance of the life Ludwig desired and a visualisation of his dreams.

"Rescuer of discarded fantasies, kitsch is the magic carpet on which we glide towards those mythical regions that, like submerged coral reefs coming into view with a low tide, constantly float around consciousness, awaiting the occasion of our interest to dispel their shrouds and appear in their full glory."[1]

[1] Olalquiaga, C., *The Souvenir in The artificial kingdom*, Pantheon Books, page 100.

In our contemporary times we can consider the castle also as kitsch because it brings to life memories of our childhood. Many people recognise in Neuschwanstein the perfect castle from their fantasies. Especially the generations who grew up with Walt Disney movies will easily associate Neuschwanstein with Disney's *Sleeping Beauty Castle*. But the heritage of King Ludwig also provides a moral lesson. On the one hand it shows the great creative power you can achieve by following your dreams, but it also shows that life is not like a fairytale wherein people live happily ever after. Neuschwanstein, like other projects of Ludwig, was never finished and his life was marked by a tragic end. The castle is an allegory of his personal narrative, perhaps a mirror of his soul.

2.3 Fantastic mini worlds

"Kitsch is a flight from the present, a siren's song luring us into a voyage void of time distinctions. It is an enchanted grotto where unknown treasures lie scattered, awaiting the lucky traveler who will rejoice at stumbling onto such wonder."[1]

Celeste Olalquiaga's book "The Artificial kingdom" opened the door to the universe where I would like to belong and connects many of my interests to the world of kitsch. I'm a daydreamer and I look at the world in the way how I like it to be. Through my lens I create a fantasy world around my life, where I strongly focus on the pleasant and joyful parts, to forget about the downside. As I wrote before, kitsch is a human desire to create an ideal image of your life and by doing so you enter a new world where the separation between reality and fantasy becomes blurry. This phenomenon we can see in artificial landscaping. One of the oldest examples are artificial caves, also called grottoes. "The earliest grottoes were shrines, built in natural caves at the sites of sacred springs in ancient Greece, to honour the resident water spirits. Over time these shrines evolved into temples; in Greek a *nymphaeum* is a temple dedicated to water nymphs. Grottoes were popular in ancient Rome and the Romans used the term *nymphaeum* for both formal temples and artificial grottoes built around public fountains. Smaller domestic nymphaea were also built in Roman villas and gardens."[2] Philosophers used grottoes as a place to contemplate and to come up with new ideas.

Basically there are two types of artificial caves; the mountain grotto which has a natural and modest look and the undersea grotto which is more extravagant and turns into a complete fantasy. Especially in Great Britain, the undersea grotto became fashionable in the 18th century, inspired by the Italian grottoes. Usually the grotto was a room under the staircase of a mansion, but it could be also a folly in the garden. Due to the Dutch overseas trading, exotic goods such as, spices, coffee, tea, Chinese porcelain, silk, cotton and shells were shipped to Europe and created a fashion for exoticism. Among the noble families there was a craze for collecting shells to study the different specimens. Soon shells were used to decorate grottoes with a great precision and a lot of patience. Beside shells, also corals, gorgonians, sea urchins, sponges, pebbles, minerals, fossils,

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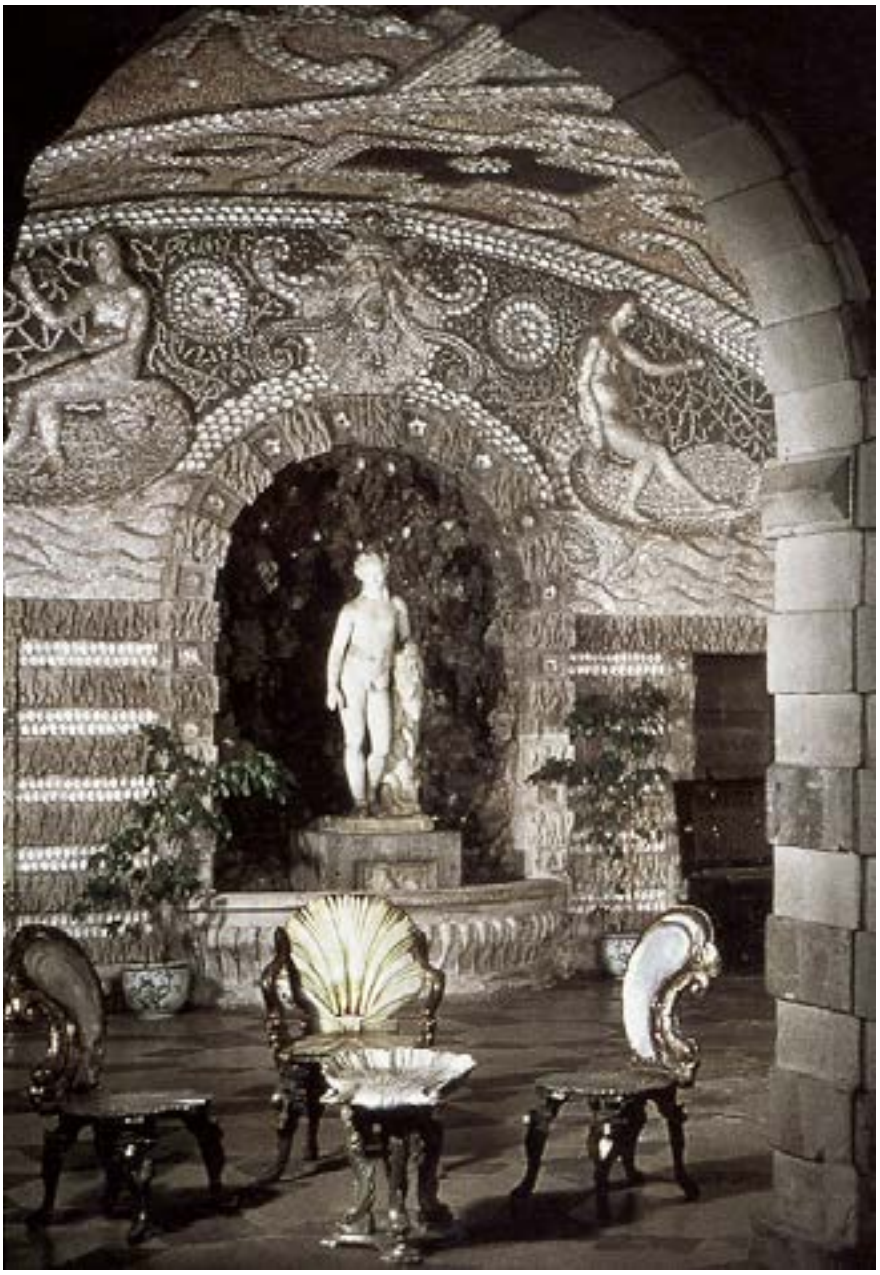
[1] Olalquiaga, C., *The Souvenir in The artificial kingdom*, Pantheon Books, page 98.

[2] Jackson, H., *Shell Houses and Grottoes*, PrinOnDemand-Worldwide.com, 2012, page 4.



Undersea grotto interior at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire

glass and mirrors were used, depending on the available resources. “The larger and more exotic a grotto’s shells, the more they excited envy and admiration. Even the earliest grottoes had lists of specimens. Owners visited each other’s grottoes to admire or criticise the design and workmanship and to study and covet unusual specimens.”[1] Next to an educational function and to gaze at the wonders of nature, grottoes developed into specially designed rooms with furniture in matching marine style, usually with shell motifs. Pools, waterfalls and fountains were added to impress guests and some grottoes were also used as bathing rooms to provide coolness and refreshments during summer days. The extravagant undersea grotto became a symbol of luxury emphasising wealth and good taste, comparable with a swimming-pool nowadays.

Kitsch and entertainment seems to fit very well together, just like entertainment and artificial caves. First of all the Romans associated the sea caves in the Bay of Naples with the goddess Venus and already used them for dining and entertainment.[2] Although these caves were natural, they were adorned with statues to turn them into temples dedicated to the water nymphs. Also King Ludwig II commissioned a Venus Grotto at Linderhof castle, to turn his fantasies into illusions of reality. His artificial cave is inspired by Grotta Azzurra (the Blue Cave on the island of Capri in Italy) and the Venus cave from Richard Wagner’s opera Tannhauser.[3] He recreated the first scene from the opera using among others, a huge painting. The grotto was a technical masterpiece at that time, featuring the first theatre lightning system that could change colours. In the middle of the cave there is a pool, mysterious lit from underwater, with machine-made waves. Ludwig used the cave to listen to his favourite music performed by a live orchestra, while he sat in a small boat in the shape of a Venus shell.

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[1] Jackson, H., *Shell Houses and Grottoes*, PrinOnDemand-Worldwide.com, 2012, page 11.

[2] Ibid., page 4.

[3] Gunn, J., *Encyclopedia of Caves and Karst Science*, 2004, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2004, page 181.

Venus Grotto at Linderhof castle, 1877

16th of Mar. 2013 Egyptian - folly at villa Stibbert ca.1864, Florence

Artificial landscaping started with grottoes, but developed further into gardens of fantasy with elements of theatre and surprise, especially in French and English gardens during the 18th and 19th century. In these gardens melancholic and nostalgic feelings come together at the same time. Partly because of the Industrial Revolution, people feared they would lose the natural beauty of the world they loved and so started to create gardens as a manifestation of their ideal. In these gardens, life size monuments, also called follies, were constructed as decor. There are various kinds of follies, from medieval ruins, towers, tunnels, ravines and grottoes to Egyptian temples and obelisks and Chinese pagodas and bridges, originating from the European fascination and idealisation of respectively the European past and the Orient. “Also known as *psychological*

22nd of Apr. 2015, shell gallery at Rosendael Castle, ca. 1730

gardens, these fantastic mini worlds attempted to unite nature and culture in a peculiar embrace that commodified the former, rendering the latter into an icon of itself: as forests, lakes and caves became objectified, *follies* turned into scenarios where personal fictions could unfold."[1] Gardens were considered places that could change your emotions. Switches in mood were created by tunnels which connected different parts of the garden.
There are plenty of examples of these gardens in Europe, but I would like to write about Rosendael castle, which has one of the oldest gardens in the Netherlands. To me, this garden is a remembrance of my grandparents who loved this place and who took me there for the first time. The garden features several follies, including a small shell cave under a waterfall, which was the

[1] Olalquiaga, C., *The Souvenir in The artificial kingdom*, Pantheon Books, page 142.

Men’s room, shell gallery at Rosendael Castle

perfect place to kiss your lover unnoticed from the castle. So this folly was also nicknamed the *love cave*. The biggest and most impressive folly is a shell gallery, symbolising the wealth and status of the noble family. In the middle, water flows from the mouth of dolphins into a waterfall. The shell gallery has on each end a open sitting chamber, one for men and one for women, which are extravagantly decorated with exotic shells and corals from all over the world.
The most famous folly of the garden is called the *Bedriegertjes,* a 17th century trick fountain which was also nicknamed the dance floor of Rosendael. During parties men were hanging out at the shell gallery and women at the *Bedriegertjes*. The Lord was hiding inside the Medieval donjon overlooking the party from a distance. At a certain moment he gave the sign to a servant to switch a handle, so the women were surprised by a floor full of small fountains which could be adjusted in height! This was also the moment for men to join and to ask the women for a dance and so the folly turned into a dance floor. Centuries later this trick fountain became a pleasant surprise for me, when I visited this place as a child. Unconsciously a strong fascination with these shell follies stuck in my head, even though I forgot the location for years.

Trick fountains, Bedriegertjes, ca. 1740,
shell wall ca. 1836-38

Chapter 3

Kitsch and jewellery

3.1 The Kitsch-man

During my kitsch research I often returned to events and trends in 19th century Europe. It seems there was no other period, where people where recalling the past on such a large scale, no doubt due to the general sentimental mood in large parts of Europe during that time. It made Kitsch almost feel like a style period, but when I look behind the dominant kitsch aesthetics it is clear that kitsch is not restricted to a certain appearance or period. Something becomes kitsch because of the personal value people attach to it.

At this point I would like to bring in a controversial concept by philosopher Hermann Broch. He launched "the concept of the *Kitschmensch;* the kitsch-person, to refer to the man of bad taste, or rather to the way in which a person of bad taste looks at, enjoys and acts when confronted with a work of art (either good or bad)."[1] Regardless of whether his concept is true or false, it's interesting to have a closer look at the relationship between kitsch, the owner of the piece and the viewer. In the introduction, I mentioned the popular Dutch television program '*Tussen Kunst en Kitsch*' (Between Art and Kitsch). Usually guests participating in this program bring stuff which is connected to a strong emotional family history, to be valued by experts. Besides their interest to learn more about the history and usage of their old stuff you can see the hope in their eyes to be the owner of a newly discovered treasure. Often they return home awakened from their illusion; their stuff is worthless. This illustrates the main point of my new kitsch understanding. Kitsch is not about the judgement of value, good taste, originality or quality. It is the strong emotional value that makes these objects irreplaceable and priceless.

Within this concept, there are two ways to label something kitsch. One is when a piece of art evokes a strong sentimental feeling with the viewer, because he recognises the emotions it originates from and connects it to his own feelings. The other is when the sentimental feelings are not visible from the outside, but are symbolically attached to the piece by the owner. I have a rococo cabinet which I consider kitsch, not because of the old-fashioned design, but due to the sentimental memories to my grandparents it evokes in me. In that way, modern houses could

[1] Brock, H., *Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches in Dichten und Erkennen*, vol. 1, 1955, page 295.

become the kitsch of the future. Memories do not even have to be tangible, kitsch can also relate to an experience. A personal example is ice skating on natural ice. Unfortunately cold winters in the Netherlands have become rare, so when they happen and allow me to ice skate again on the lake in the forest of my home town, they evoke in me strong sentimental feelings and enable me to relive many good memories.

The kitsch-man as mentioned by Hermann Broch is, in my opinion, not the man of bad taste, but anyone who values objects and experiences as carriers of personal memories out of nostalgic or melancholic feelings. This personal emotional value explains why something can be kitsch for one person and meaningless to another and why kitsch is not restricted to taste, social class, nationality or age. Kitsch can relate to various things, like your native country, the house of your childhood, a souvenir and so on. Because of this shape shifting quality, kitsch is never outdated, and is recreating itself in the present, which makes kitsch so interesting. Since I assume most anyone can think of personal examples, I consider almost everybody a kitsch-person.

3.2 Jewellery; carrier of memories

While reading I often felt that I can easily replace the word kitsch for jewellery and the story still makes sense. Jewellery is a way to express yourself either in a conscious or unconscious way. It tells something about the person you are, or the person you want to be. Jewellery, like kitsch, is much more focused on the individual person and relates to our emotions, wishes and desires. Hereby jewellery can be seen as carrier of emotions or memories.

Art historian Marianne Unger underlines that most of the meanings carried by jewellery is related to memories.[1] She explains, jewellery acts as carriers of memories which can then be read as symbols. Sometimes these symbols can only be recognised by the wearer, or a select group of people, such as members of a community or religion. Other symbols can be read by broad layers of the population. “In addition to the primary motives of wearing jewellery, people feel the need to relate their existence to the people who lived before, with them or after them. So the act of wearing jewellery can be seen as a primary requirement in life.”[2] People often purchase jewellery to mark a special event in their life, such as a engagement ring which is the objectification of love and a wedding ring that serves as the seal of a love alliance. But jewellery can also connect to dark moments of your life. In this respect I see an interesting connection with Victorian mourning jewellery, which fulfilled a sentimental desire to keep tangible memories to one’s kin alive. Moving the focus from the deceased to the emotional state of the widow, displaying her inner feelings to the outside world is typically kitsch. Queen Victoria was mourning for several years after the death of her husband in 1869 and strict etiquette described how a widow should appear during the stages of full mourning and half-mourning, before going back to normal life. Each phase was visible in the outfit worn.[3]

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[1] Unger, M., *Sieraden in context*, Offsetdrukkerij Jan de Jong, 2008, page 139, translated by the author.

[2] Ibid., 142-143, translated by the author.

[3] Not lost But gone before: mourning jewelry, Historic new England, http://www.historicnewengland.org, December, 2016.

Victorian mourning jewellery

Top left: 14k earrings, each a foil-backed closed collet set dark citrine's. On the right: blond hair woven brooch of open table work with drops.

Bottom left: 14k ring with woven hair inside. Brooch with miniature hair work, on the right.

Mourning jewellery from jet

Left: In 1869 a new sophistication was noted by the curator of the Whitby Museum, who wrote to the *Art Journal* that now, the 'best workmen are imitating the beautiful Roman cameos, and models of antique gems'. This parure of 1870–85 is carved with female heads, which symbolise Night, framed by foliage, flowers and scrolls (height of the earrings 6.5cm/2.5in).

Below: This cross of roses linked with a ribbon bow is of moulded vulcanite and dates from c.1875 (height 8.2cm/3.2in). The colour of this manmade alternative has not proved very durable – on prolonged exposure to light vulcanite turns brown.

During full mourning, the widow had to focus on reflecting the loss and therefore the outfit should be as dull and unadorned as possible.[1] Wearing jewellery could be interpreted as disrespectful, so hardly any jewellery was worn in this stage. After one year, getting into the stage of half-mourning, one was allowed to wear some modest jewellery to reflect one's sadness and connection to the deceased.
Mourning jewellery was often limited to somber black materials, like fossilised wood, which is light weight and easy to shape. But an interesting development was the addition of personal relics of the deceased, such as hair. Traditionally there was only a lock of hair included in pendants and medallions, but during the 19th century hair work developed into a certain kind of miniature paintings which symbolically represented mourning.[2] Sometimes jewellery consisted almost completely out of hair, usually woven in modest patterns. Jewellery became a tangible remembrance to the deceased.

Nowadays there are also contemporary examples of mourning jewellery, because people still desire to wear tangible memories. A common example is jewellery with casted fingerprints, but it can go as far as compressing the ashes of the deceased into artificial made diamonds, promoted by companies like *Lifegem* or *Soulgem.* It takes from two to four months to turn ashes into diamonds with a maximum resulting size of two carat.[3] The act of wearing the objectification of the body of your loved one, seems the strongest expression of sentimental feelings. Ethically I wonder whether this method is justified, but in relation to kitsch and jewellery as a carrier of memories, it reaches the top.
Jewellery is not always a visible carrier of emotions, it can have hidden memories attached to it. I strongly experienced this emotional connection during my goldsmith internship and I was surprised to see how many people have stories connected to jewellery and are most eager to share this information with me as a stranger. When they give me a wearable object for repair, they give me, in effect, a very personal belonging, trusting my craftsmanship. That also explains why people do not care if the cost of the repair exceeds the material value of the piece. Jewellery is not only a carrier of emotions, but also a tool to evoke them. That explains why people feel the need to keep jewellery close to their body and why they feel bare without it.

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[1] Condra, J., *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Clothing Through World History*, The Greenwood publishing group, 2008, page 84.

[2] Huibers, J., *Twee eeuwen sieraden*, De Groot Drukkerij bv., page 44, translated by the author.

[3] Scholtens, B., *Een tweede leven als diamant*, De Volkskrant, juli 2, 2005, translated by the author.

Brooch of Berlin iron, ca. 1820

Comb of Berlin iron, with a cast cameo of Iris in the gallery, ca. 1820

Jewellery often passes on as heirloom from one generation to the next thereby accumulating emotions over time. When this happens, it doesn't always fit the taste of the new generation leading to a wish to recycle it into something new. People are pushing the boundaries of how far you can go in modification without losing the the emotional attachment. I have seen how the ornaments from an old-fashioned brooch of a grandmother were transformed into stylish earrings and how an impressive diamond set necklace was turned into modern solitaire rings for all grandchildren. Even a brand new piece can keep the remembrance through reusing the gold, silver and gemstones. So memories are not necessarily linked to the aesthetics, but can symbolically pass on through the material.

An interesting example in this respect is Berlin Iron jewellery, which appeared at the beginning of the 19th century. Germany was at war against Napoleon when "the Prussian Royal family requested that the aristocracy and upper classes contribute their precious jewellery to help fund the War of Liberation. In return, these citizens were given iron jewellery in appreciation of their loyalty, and many of those pieces were inscribed with the phrase 'Gold gab ich für Eisen' (I gave gold for iron)."[1] For me there is an interesting contradiction between iron as a rough low value material and its role in technological changes in human society, together with the association with the Napoleon wars and the fragile black lace aesthetics of the jewellery designs. I'm wondering what happened to the personal memories after the exchange. Since Iron jewellery was made by sand casting it is very likely that people received an iron casted piece, one of several copies, in return for their crafted jewellery, which makes it much more difficult to pass on the memories, connected to the original piece. But maybe this transmission was less important than having a symbol of your support of the greater good: "Giving something precious for an important cause is considered one of the most respectful ways to show honour and fidelity towards a Crown or government. It shows solidarity and unity within a community, regardless of its age."[2] Besides carrier of personal memories, iron jewellery became a carrier of public memories and the act of wearing it, a symbol of nationalism and patriotism.

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[1] Berstein, B., *Highly collectible: Berlin Iron and cut-steel jewelry,* http://www.thejewelleryeditor.com/jewellery/vintage/article/berlin-iron-cut-steel-vintage-jewelry-collectible/, December 2016.

[2] Peters, L.H., *Berlin Iron Jewellery*, http://artofmourning.com/2014/05/08/berlin-ironwork-jewellery/ December 2016.

3.3 Contemporary jewellery: fine-arts or kitsch?

In 1998 the Kitsch Movement was founded by Odd Nerdrum, among others, and this movement highlights the relation between kitsch and life. According to their vision “Kitsch is about the eternal human question, the pathetic, whatever its form, about what we call *the human*. Kitsch serves life and therefore seeks the individual, in contradiction to art’s irony and dispassion.”[1] Their Kitsch manifesto suggests that we shouldn’t consider kitsch art, but something else. What about jewellery? Around the 70s contemporary jewellery emerged to break with traditional craftsmanship and artists started to connect to the fine-art scene. I have the feeling that many jewellers still fight too hard for this recognition. Maybe it's just not as good a match as we wish? This raises for me the question: does contemporary jewellery maybe better fit with kitsch?

So far, I only wrote about jewellery as a carrier of private and public memories of the wearer, but looking at contemporary jewellery the meaning of the maker is more outspoken. Contemporary jewellery is a form of expression from the artist, a personal reflection on how he or she experiences the world. The most intimate feelings and thoughts can be expressed. As the artist’s meaning is much more present compared to traditional jewellery, it makes me wonder why people would like to wear somebody else’s emotions? Looking at contemporary jewellery I think it has similarities with music, where highly personal feelings are expressed in a more neutral way. By saying neutral I do not mean that the pieces are impersonal, but they provide space for everyone’s interpretation. For example, consider a love song where the artist sings about his or her own lover. By keeping the song neutral, the listener can identify with the person in the story and connect it to his or her own life. Since jewellery is so personally related to the body it is important for people to understand the work in one or another way.
In an attempt to connect to the fine art scene, contemporary jewellery became more disconnected from the body. One of the most beloved pieces of jewellery is the brooch for its sculptural possibilities. Ironically the brooch is perceived as old-fashioned in the traditional jewellery scene and it is also the only piece of jewellery which is not worn directly on the skin and therefore the most detached.

[1] Nerdrum, O., et al., *On Kitsch*, Lulu press, 2014, pag 11.

“Since the 19th century the position of jewellery changed dramatically in European society. Before everybody was dressed and was wearing jewellery belonging to your class. Some jewellery was reserved for the noble families. After about 1800 everybody with money could purchase any type of jewellery.”[1] The progress of jewellery opening up to a bigger audience somehow has been reversed in the contemporary jewellery scene. Just a very small group of people is attracted to these objects.

For jewellery makers art and craft were always one. Jewellers were not limited to their technical skills, but also made sketches for new designs that reflect the commissioner. Kitsch is often accused of producing work which is easy to understand on the surface, but for me, this feature is not a weakness, but its power. That’s why so many people can relate kitsch to their own life and project their own personal emotions into the piece. In relation to jewellery, this concept is so important, because jewellery is not just an object, but it becomes a part of your life and your body and underlines your identity. A great example is one of my beloved jewellers, Manfred Bischoff, who understood this important connection. For him the *surface* or *horizon* of a piece is a starting point for people to identify with it. Even if there is a deeper meaning behind, you have to seduce the audience to come along into your world. Manfred explains: “If I make a bird, they can immediately identify with it by calling it *a bird*. They accept it as their own object, which they themselves have seen.”[2] Some people will stop reading at the surface, just looking at the beauty of the recognisable form and precious fine-gold, but others will be curious to reach the deeper layers kept inside.

Contemporary artists, designers, scientists, photographers and other disciplines are all mixed up and working together. Everybody can work in different fields at the same time, so it doesn’t make sense anymore to think in boxes. Why do I have to choose between being a jewellery artist or designer? I’m not interested in defining myself in these terms, I make jewellery and the body is my only restriction.

Kitsch is a term derived to separate high from low culture and feels outdated to me. Therefore I don’t want to conclude that contemporary jewellery is kitsch instead of fine-arts. At the same time, I would argue that jewellery makers should not forget one of jewellery’s main functions is as carriers of memories, of emotions.

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[1] Huibers, J., *Twee eeuwen sieraden*, De Groot Drukkerij bv., page 7, translated by the author.

[2] Bischoff, M., Dialog between Manfred Bischoff and Pieranna Cavalchini in Manfred Bischoff, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2002, page 12.

Manfred Bisschoff, brooch, fine gold

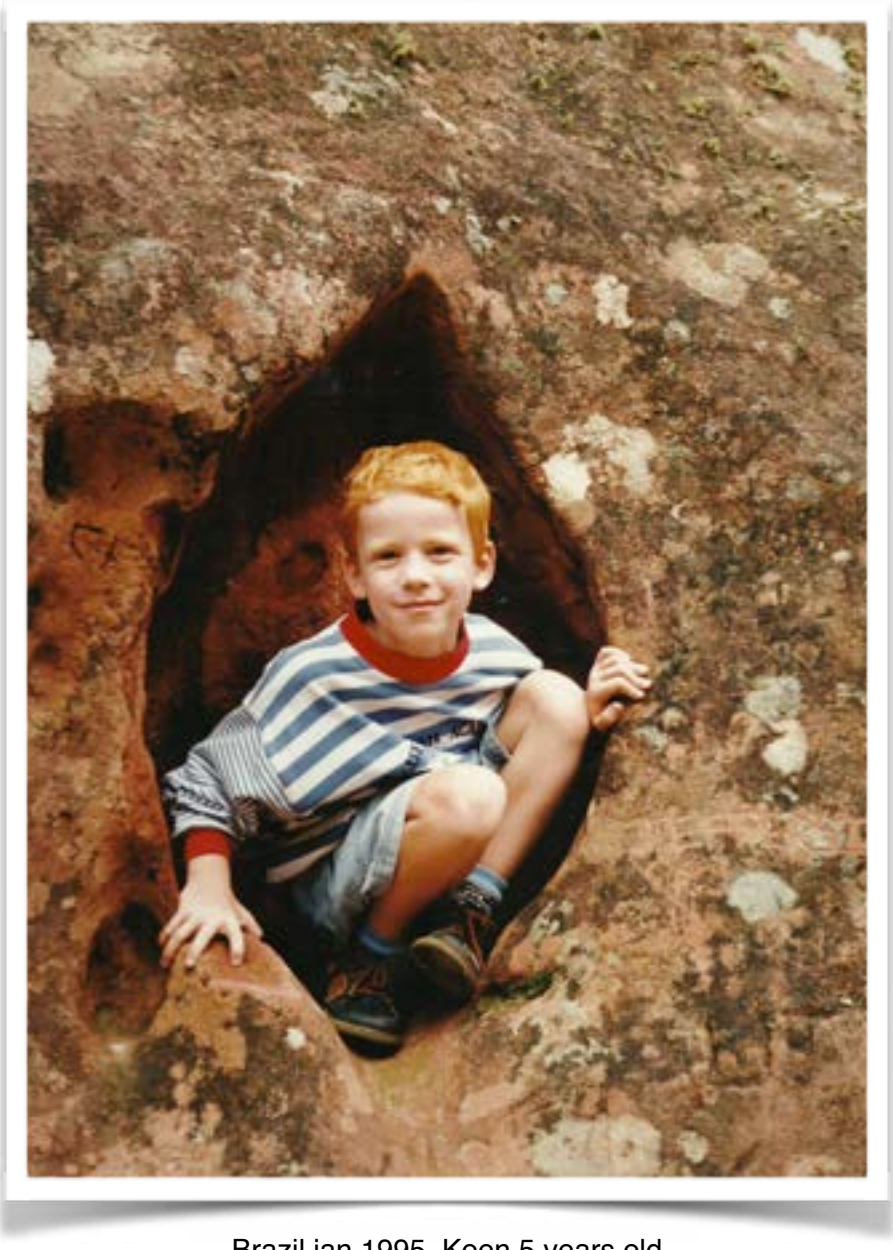
Conclusion

From the 19th century onwards the imposed judgement of good taste changed and people had more freedom to make their own independent judgements. At this particular moment in history, the idea of ‘a bad taste’ and ‘kitsch’ arose as a way to criticise the upcoming mass culture and their taste. Interestingly, according to Kant, bad art can evoke a similar kind of pleasure as good art, not because of the qualities of the piece, but due to personal desires and memories. People who love kitsch cannot separate their personal interest from independent qualities.

Kitsch is often used as an expression of bad taste, but my research refutes this preconception. The ideology of kitsch artists is actually to create masterpieces and they glorify the refined craft skills and classic beauty ideal of the Greek, Roman and Renaissance artists. The line between real and fake and between beautiful and ugly is blurry, so our judgement is more a reflection of our perspective and how we experience the world. Something that is considered a good taste today, might be labelled kitsch in the future. The definition of art has always changed through the centuries and this development will go on. Today anything can be seen as art and it comes in so many variations that there is always something to one’s taste. We should stop making hierarchies.

For me kitsch is no longer linked to taste or a quality judgement, but it is a lens which filters and transforms our sensory perception of an experience into memories. Nostalgic kitsch is based on conscious memories, where all harsh reality has been filtered out. Melancholic kitsch is based on unconscious memories, where the perception of time has been lost. So, in essence, kitsch is the materialisation of our wishes, dreams and fantasies with the aim to make life more pleasant and joyful. Kitsch is a human desire to keep memories tangible and alive and is very powerful because these memories can be projected on anything.

A good example of nostalgic kitsch, is King Ludwig II’s Neuschwanstein castle. Despite its mishmash of historical styles, it is a total art-work, an expression of Ludwig’s fantasy world and an an allegory of his personal narrative. For contemporary visitors it is also kitsch, because it evokes memories of their childhood.



Brazil jan.1995, Koen 5 years old

Artificial landscaping is an example where elements of nostalgic and melancholic kitsch come together. Psychological gardens were created as an idealisation of the natural beauty of the world, with artificial caves and life-size monuments.
In contrast to Ludwig's castles, these gardens where not just made for the owner, but functioned as an decor for entertainment and as a symbol of power to impress guests. This also explains the relationship between kitsch and extravagant decorations, as can be found, in particular, in undersea grottoes. These fantasy worlds reveal the kitsch desire to discover hidden treasures, such as shells and corals, and to became a symbol of luxury to emphasise wealth and good taste.
Although kitsch has dominant aesthetics and a peak moment in the 19th century, it cannot be seen as a style period. Kitsch is not about judgement of a value, good taste, originality or quality, but has to do with the personal value people attach to things. This explains why something may be kitsch to one person, but meaningless to another and why kitsch is not restricted to taste, social class, nationality or age. Kitsch is of all times and can relate to various things such as an object, an experience, a person, or a place. The kitsch-person as mentioned by Hermann Broch, is not the person of bad taste, but anyone who values objects and experiences as carriers of personal memories out of nostalgic or melancholic feelings. After my kitsch research, I experienced the Dutch television program '*tussen kunst en kitsch*', (between art and kitsch) in a different way. It is not just a platform to value objects, it reveals the memories attached to the objects and triggers viewers to to think about objects they own and recall connected memories.
I see a strong connection between kitsch and jewellery as a carrier of memories. Jewellery can help us keep our personal memories tangible in a way that is not only readable by the owner but by the viewer as well. A great example of the latter is Victorian mourning jewellery, which exposes the mourners inner feelings to the outside world. Jewellery is often passed on as heirlooms and modified to fit the taste of new generation. This shows that people can connect memories to the material instead of the aesthetic appearance. An example is Berlin Iron jewellery where people contributed their precious jewellery to help fund the war and they got an iron piece in exchange.

Since contemporary jewellery can be seen as a highly personal expression from the artist, its meaning should connect somehow to the emotions of the wearer in order to be worn. Kitsch is often derided for being easily understandable, but this is actually a powerful feature, making it easier for people to connect and identify with it, something which contemporary jewellery will need to reach a bigger audience. Although jewellery fits better to kitsch than fine-arts, because of the strong focus on the individual person, it feels no longer applicable to think in these boxes. Jewellery makers should not forget one of jewellery's primary functions as carrier of memories and emotions. Contemporary jewellery needs more kitsch, a *surface* or *horizon* for people to relate to.
When my teachers associated my work with kitsch, I thought it was because of my particular material and colour use. But after my research the biggest eyeopener was to realise that kitsch has to do with a strong emotional value and, to be more specific, with personal sentimental memories that are attached to the piece. So to define my work as kitsch you have to know me very personally, unless my work triggers a sentimental feeling of your own.

Photo credits

Cover, Page 2, 10, 21-23, 25, 34-37, 39, 51, 53; by Koen Jacobs

Page 12 *AugustusPrimaPorta-Vatican Museum,* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_of_Prima_Porta, September 18, 2015

Page 13 Greek Cuirass-Torso of a warrior remake and original, Brinkman, V., Wünsche, R., Wurnig, U., *Bunte Götter, S*taatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, 2004.

Page 16 Wiley, K., *Napoleon Leading the Army Over the Alps*, 2006, http://www.kehindewiley.com/Rumors_of_War/Napoleon.html, November, 2016

Page 27 Interior (winding staircase) at Neuschwanstein castle, Schwangau, Germany, Photographer Dawes, M., http://www.thousandwonders.net/Neuschwanstein Januari, 2017

Page 28 Jank, C., *History of the origins of Neuschwanstein Castle,* http://www.neuschwanstein.com/englisch/idea/index.htm, Januari 2017

Page 29 Schatz, U.G., Ulrichs, F., *Neuschwanstein Castle*, Bosch Druck, 2014, page 18-19.

Page 31 Interior shell room at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, U.K. https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/288582288599117244/ Januari, 2017

Page 33 Interior Venus grotto at Schloss Linderhof, Ettal, Germany
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