

Zevk
Meselesi
A Question
of Taste

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A Question of Taste

“Kitsch is the world as we would like it to be, not as it is; the capturing in a concrete thing of the most ineffable feelings and tenderest emotions.”¹

A snow globe filled with glitter instead of snow. Transparent and plastic. The glitter falls on a single rose. A well-bloomed rose, with beautiful leaves. It stands on a transparent plastic plate situated right at the center of the globe, and is thus visible in exactly the same way from all sides of the globe. When the globe is shaken, the glitter begins to float around the rose, glowing in tones of vivid pink and green. If the internet was an object, it could have been this globe. Produced in China, transported to San Francisco to be sold, and sent to Turkey as a gift, this object reflects contemporary visual culture in every sense: its material, aesthetic, falsehood, and its reconciliation with its falsehood; the manner in which it transports the GIFs we are accustomed to encountering on the computer screen to our physical world; how it reminds us of the symbolic burden long-carried by the red rose while feeding off of the fact that it has been considered cool enough to be recently printed on sports socks; its transportability to geographies far away from its place of production and its capacity to appeal to a global “taste” that allows it to be received with the same enthusiasm wherever it goes. This globe is a great starting point for addressing the concepts we will be using to examine contemporary visual culture such as taste, aesthetics, class dispositions, mass culture and art, kitsch and *camp*, real and fake, physical and digital, “good” and “bad” taste.

A Question of Taste is a group exhibition that deals with kitsch, a concept whose meaning has shifted since the 19th century, and the intimate relationship this concept has established with today’s visual culture as well as its critical role in shaping taste. The first part focuses on the concept of taste as a class indicator following a brief evaluation of how kitsch, as a concept that is highly difficult to define, has been addressed historically. The second part of the exhibition looks at the sense of aesthetics, and the values ascribed to the East and the West. Focusing on the rise of mass culture against high art, the third part finally aims to explore the rich uses of the concept of kitsch in dialogue with the artists whose works are included in the exhibition, and based on the relationship between art and visual culture that has been shaped in the process of transition from object culture to digital culture. It questions the concept of taste, which reinforces the separation of classes within the societal structure, through both objects, and the visual language that has dominated the internet since the early 90s.

The word kitsch, which has been used to describe cheap and popular paintings or sketches in post-industrial Germany, gradually transformed into a complex concept that found its place in various languages, untranslated. Most of the adjectives used to describe kitsch are negative. These include: tasteless, cheap, worthless, shallow, mediocre, decorative, bad, junk, fake, popular, fancy, copy, subclass, cliché, imitation, makeshift, plastic, synthetic, ugly, formulaic and mass appealing. In the 1930s, Herman Broch defined kitsch as the result of a simple issue of supply and demand.² According to Broch, the demand for kitsch increases with the spread of its production. It is in this same period that Walter Benjamin also states that unlike art, kitsch doesn’t require an intellectual effort or critical distance.³ Subsequently, in 1939, Clement Greenberg writes his seminal art historical essay, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.” As one of the leading advocates of American modern art, Greenberg addresses art and kitsch as two opposing concepts; he is inspired by Kant’s 18th century writings on taste and adopts a Marxist approach when discussing the dangers of kitsch’s infiltrating art. For Greenberg, “Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. 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.”⁴ The transformation of the class structure might have had an impact on the approach of the 1930s to kitsch. The fact that being a member of the upper class was contingent upon intellectual accumulation rather than economic power simultaneously required the positioning of kitsch against the avant-garde, and thus preserved the distant stance of art. Rather than representing membership in an economic or even a social group, taste aligns a person with other consumer affinities.⁵ It was also during

this period that the male-dominated art world, which formed a union through taste, rejected and excluded the nature of kitsch, thus facilitating the advancement of the status of art in the face of this dichotomy.

In his 1962 essay titled, *The Structure of Bad Taste*, writer Umberto Eco evaluates Greenberg's essay. Eco states, "[...] not only does the avant-garde emerge as a reaction to the diffusion of Kitsch, but Kitsch keeps renewing itself and thriving on the very discoveries of the avant-garde."⁶ Eco finds the dialectic of kitsch and the avant-garde useful. Kitsch is not the only party that borrows in this relationship; avant-garde also frequently borrows from kitsch. Eco does not refrain from differentiating bad taste from good taste, but confirms that taste is not definable. On the other hand, Susan Sontag seeks to define the concept of *camp* – a concept that has become an ally of kitsch and that has also settled itself in Turkish with the same name – in her essay titled, "Notes on 'Camp'" published in 1964. She defines *camp* as the urban, apolitical, playful taste for the unnatural, that is, artificial and exaggerated. While it is not easy to describe and outline a particular taste, Sontag defines the taste she pinpoints using bullet points and examples. In this regard, "Notes on 'Camp'" is almost a *camp* manifesto. "*Camp* sees everything in quotation marks. [...] Camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is 'too much.'"⁷ It recommends that you establish a new relationship with seriousness and that you view it from a different perspective. "*Camp* taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment. [...] It doesn't argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good", but motivates the reader to form a different "set of standards. [...] The sensibility of high culture has no monopoly upon refinement. Camp asserts that good taste is not simply good taste; that there exists, indeed, a good taste of bad taste."⁸ Sontag's essay is inspiring in terms of the manner in which it bends the boundaries between classes. She offers a new perspective on how taste can be independent of judgment, and identifies *camp* with the "love for human nature". And she concludes her essay with the ultimate camp statement: "it's good *because* it's awful."⁹

By the 1970s, Jean Baudrillard identifies kitsch as a cultural category with the unreal, simulation and imitation. He positions it as an element of consumer society, in opposition to the beautiful and aesthetic.¹⁰ Around the same time, Matei Calinescu links the recent re-emergence of kitsch in the context of high art to the close relationship it establishes with irony.¹¹ Similar to Eco, Calinescu asserts that avant-garde and kitsch feed off each other, which he argues is proof of the complexity of kitsch as a concept. For him, kitsch is the result of romanticism's desire to escape reality, and is "one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics."¹² Calinescu also delineates the concepts of upper class and working-class kitsch. He describes kitsch as an internationally accepted "aesthetic lie"¹³ that provides comfort to the viewer, as he continuously underscores how indescribable it is. Then in 1979, Pierre Bourdieu publishes his much-revered book, *Distinction*. Here, he focuses on the French bourgeoisie to discuss how judgment of taste can be an identification of class, and how some symbols shape the balances of power in social relations, adding, "Taste classifies the classifier."¹⁴ Drawing on the ideas of Bourdieu, Ali Artun proposes an evaluation of today: "The reality of Bourdieu's arguments in 1979 that art is a tool that reinforces class distinctions and social polarization, rather than one that unites people as it was hoped, is even more evident in today's museums, galleries, auctions, biennials and fairs."¹⁵

Giorgio Agamben, whose book *Taste* was published in the same year as *Distinction*, addresses truth and beauty as two opposing concepts: "Science knows the truth but cannot enjoy it, and that taste enjoys beauty, without being able to explain it."¹⁶ For him, the aesthetics problem of taste arises from this duality: While Agamben defines aesthetic taste as "a knowledge not known", he defines political taste as one that is evaluated/judged

and quantifiable. Can pleasure know, can knowledge enjoy, the enigmatic relation of these concepts is, for Agamben, one of the essential qualities of modern society.¹⁷

In light of this short historical process, taste may still be an indication of class today, but the structure of the mechanisms that feed and strengthen this signal has now become different. Inspired by kitsch's inclusive and diverse structure, contemporary art practices that borrow, repeat, change and re-present are evolving as they become intertwined with social movements. Can kitsch be rid of its old definition and addressed differently with the recent popularization of American social movements, such as "Me Too" and "Black Lives Matter"; and the rise of a multicultural and pluralist approach? Artist and designer Louise Schouwenberg asks: "How cynical is the concept of "taste" in a time when everything seems possible, and we are no longer constrained by frameworks set in stone?"¹⁸

Taste as an Indication of Class

Taste determines the boundaries of high and low culture through signs without fully describing them, and kitsch stretches these boundaries and expands

the gray zone between the two sides. Ruth Holliday and Tracey Potts whose research focus extensively on kitsch and who have contributed to this publication, assert, "to say that taste is entirely a product of class fails to acknowledge the intersectionalities of identity."¹⁹ Focusing on these intersectionalities may be possible by observing art production and how it takes shape. The appreciation of the unique, original and exclusive against the mass produced following the Industrial Revolution becomes ambiguous with the artistic production of art practitioners whose works carry traces of collective culture. In this regard, a visual language is being shaped where art and craft or instinctive and acquired taste are intertwined. In the words of Chus Martinez, who has also contributed to this publication, "Art exists for a reason, not for validating a social class."²⁰ Included in this section are three artists who address the relationship of taste and class in their works.

Gülsün Karamustafa, whose works titled, *Tigerella* (1983), *Watermelon Carpet* (1986), *Ascension* (1981) and *Spiral* (1981) are presented in the exhibition, has been thinking about and producing works that deal with the concept of kitsch for a long time. Kitsch is fueled by the shifts both between times and geographies; the transportation of the village aesthetic to the city plays a significant role in the artist's works. The collage works *Watermelon* and *Tigerella*, which she created using the scrap fabrics she collected from houses during the period in the 1980s when she worked as an art director in films, repurpose some of the visual signs such as flower and animal prints, by infiltrating the stratified structure of the city following mass migration. *Ascension* and *Spiral*, on the other hand, recall still images from a film set, which gained a dimension through the use of plastic plants and found objects. The artist frequently takes on the visual language of the objects and fabrics that were used in households and thus reflected in films.

Brazilian artist Bruno Miguel, on the other hand, participates in the exhibition with an installation composed of sculptures and titled *These People in the Dining Room* (2012-14). The title of the work is derived from the lyrics of the song *Panis et Circenses* [Bread and Games] by the group *Os Mutantes*, which was formed as part of the *Tropicalia* movement during the period of dictatorship in Brazil in the late 60s. Each of the sculptures is presented in hybrid forms that evoke the artificial and natural at the same time, and where the artist transforms porcelain trinkets collected from auctions or flea markets using materials such as foam, wire, paper pulp and striking colors. The cups and plates, which were once upon a time preserved for the most important guests, perhaps used very rarely, become part of this vibrant forest designed by the artist. Bringing together Brazil's colonial past and the colorful world of the Rio Carnival, which takes place every year in Rio de Janeiro and dates back to

the 17th century, the installation is based on contrasts such as high/low culture, upper/lower class that have historically coexisted in the country and have shaped its cultural identity. Can the porcelains representing the hard-to-attain class and the neon colored palms trees embraced by mass culture congregate at the dinner table?

Similarly, Volkan Aslan, who frequently uses found porcelains in his works, produces an installation specifically for the exhibition, inspired by the Kütahya Tiles and Ceramics Collection, one of the three main collections of the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation. Dating back to the 20th century, the vibrant colored ceramic figures from the collection that have been produced by different masters become the inspiration for Aslan, whose new works come together with these Kütahya ceramics in the installation. At times, the artist's works and the works from the collection are indistinguishable from one another. The installation turns into a platform where seemingly opposing concepts such as original and copy, real and fake, art and craft become intertwined, essentially questioning this opposition.

The nature of creating collections evolve, and become repetitive, in the 19th century along with the beginning of image production through mass production and photography according to Celeste Olalquiaga.²¹ Melancholic kitsch and nostalgic kitsch, the two concepts Olalquiaga focuses on in her book, *Artificial Kingdom*, are related to collecting. For Olalquiaga, nostalgic kitsch is the result of an attempt to keep the past alive, while melancholic kitsch accepts loss, knowing that there can be no imitation to replace it.²² Displayed at various locations in the exhibition, the prison bead collection consists of various beadwork made by prisoners in prisons from the early 1900s to the 1990s, and establishes a connection with the concept of "melancholic kitsch". First launched by the convicted soldiers in the British prison camps following World War II, this tradition still continues today in prisons across Turkey. Prisoners producing these wallets, bags, cigarette cases, cologne holders or various other ornaments using glass and opaline beads can use these beadworks to send messages to their relatives outside or earn income by selling them. Requiring meticulous and elaborate craftsmanship, beadwork is also a practice that helps prisoners pass the time. The personal history conveyed by each beadwork and the situation they represent in the broader sense, namely, imprisonment or the loss of freedom is a representation of melancholic kitsch, and thus the collection's direct connection to the exhibition. While the exhibition explores kitsch in the context of contemporary art, it continues to trace kitsch in everyday objects that have distinct stories through this collection.

Rectangular Maps of the Global World

Taste is a concept that has been shaped geographically, but one that has also spread globally, especially with digitalization. Vernacular

preferences can quickly get adopted and accepted by everyone and this condition is defined as *monoculture*; such as homes all around the world furnished with Scandinavian design sensibilities. Looking from where we are, aesthetics is a fundamental concept that emerges from the West. The concept of aesthetics makes one feel like all of the emulated values are on the side of the map where the sun sets, and all of the cultures that remain on the side where the sun rises are "low culture". In recent years, however, a recalibration was made following the realization of this problematic situation. The fact that the East is considered *cool* from time to time causes the repositioning of traditional practices such as yoga, meditation, shawl, batik, and marbling into contemporary languages. In the context of Turkey, the dichotomy of the village vs. city aesthetic emerges in different ways: a tapestry being transformed into a contemporary artwork or a ceramic designer pot made with the mold of a yoghurt container. Could there be a strange re-appropriation during a period marked by retreating towards the East, both in terms of spirituality and taste? The artists whose works are featured in this section adopt kitsch with their pluralist approach, and

without resorting to an orientalist perspective, instead utilizing it as a tool to stretch the structures of class society.

The four-channel video installation, *Easternsports* (2014), directed by artist Alex Da Corte incorporates a text by Jason Musson, who is known for the web series, “Art Thoughtz.” Inspired by American playwright Thornton Wilder’s 1938 play, *Our Town*. A vignette-style portrayal of daily life of the period, with directors such as Peter Greenaway, Jim Henson, and David Lynch, the installation offers theatrical comments on a range of subjects including art theory, the banality of social media, class, race, gender and consumer culture. Real and surreal characters such as women doing yoga or taking *selfies*, twins playing beer pong, people doing karaoke, skateboarders, a mummy, a man riding a horse or a witch smoking a cigarette blend into the background in their costumes. With its pop visual style, the video depicts a fake world, and does not try to hide its fakeness. Accompanied by colorful chairs and fake oranges that extend from the video to the installation, the neon symbols displayed on the walls where the video is projected and the plastic floor coverings express today’s visual culture in poetic and sometimes absurd language. While reflecting on the culture that the West has borrowed and instrumentalized from the East, it questions the hierarchy between mass culture and high culture.

Art collective Slavs and Tatars’s *Pickle Politics* (2019) series looks at the symbolism of the process of fermentation, by way of notions with double meanings such as the rotten, the spoiled, and the soured. Pickle juice is a medium, which the artists utilize to interpret cultural differences. Pickle juice, which is believed to be remedial for a hangover in the East and is generally sold as homemade, is marketed as a sports beverage in the West; notwithstanding the East’s defeated melancholic stance, the West always takes a positive attitude. *To Turn* is inspired by PVC curtains that divide markets or butchers spatially for purposes such as providing hygiene and temperature control. The curtain draws attention to the simultaneous association of fermentation with the concepts of decay and preservation—which are seemingly in opposition—while its logo, which evokes a sports beverage bottle, addresses the use of pickle juice in different geographies. Using humor, the work challenges established norms with plays on words, such as “Salection de luxe”, “Turşu und termie”, and “High Yield Infidillity” or the feminist nipple intervention on the pickle. The pickle juice vending machine titled, *Brine and Punishment* presents the pickle juice in bottles designed by the artists and prepared by Petek Turşuları (Petek Pickles).

Artist duo FAILE recreate an installation that they initially realized for their *Shrine* project in 2016. Inspired by different elements of worship such as roadside shrines, prayer wheels and temples, the artists reinterpret these structures within a contemporary visual language, thereby contemplating the divine and the mundane together. The figure of the Virgin Mary, which we are used to seeing in such structures, is replaced by a female figure holding a skateboard, while the tiles with Islamic motifs adorning the framing structure of the installation remind the viewers of the walls of a mosque. The installation brings together various clues from belief systems directly pointed out by religious symbols, bearing the hope of believing in a reality beyond ordinary everyday life against the modern and contemporary art practices that are centered around the West. *Shrine* is a place of fictional memory where shared memories and unpredictable futures can bring everyone together on common ground, regardless of class differences.

The video titled, *Dream Soup* (2019) by artist Farah Al Qasimi, who continues to work in New York, takes place in a shop that produces fake perfumes in the United Arab Emirates. Selling women’s perfumes with names such as Feminism, Pink Chill, Only She, Flawless, Nice Lady, Tender Feelings, Extreme Happiness, Lovable, Desire and men’s perfumes called Macho

Man and Man Hood, this highly disordered shop houses various colored liquids that are being transferred into colorful perfume bottles decorated with gold. Materials such as funnels and containers that evoke test tubes come together in this uncanny environment, miles away from science, and where labels are attached with the help of irons. The men and women's perfumes categorized into plastic boxes overlook the non-binary gender concept ignored by the advertising slogans that idealize the identities of men and women. The accompanying soundtrack that initially creates the dream-like atmosphere that a perfume and its promises could offer, evolves into a realistic nightmare in the minutes that follow. Advertising posters for perfumes of well-known brands remind us that the process of making these perfumes is not that different. The gray area between the real and the fake is an implication of the fragility of the value judgments created by consumption culture.

But Gullüm*

One of the reasons for the historical positioning of mass culture against "high art" is considered to be the identification of mass culture with women: The understanding of mass culture as feminine and inferior dates back to the end of the 19th century, namely, the beginning of mass production according to Andreas Huyssen.²³ According to Huyssen, modernism arose out of mass culture and the desire to keep threatening "female" aspects of the masses away. For Huyssen, the collapse of this understanding, which locates both women and mass culture as the wretched "other," corresponds to the collapse of modernism itself.²⁴ Tracey Potts and Ruth Holliday's essays, as included in this catalogue, also address the association of kitsch with femininity and relate the transformation kitsch goes through following the 1960s with the rise of women artists. While Sontag, who wrote on *camp* during the 60s, argues that there is a direct relationship between *queer* and *camp*.²⁵ The efficacy of queer feminism in the formation of a concept like *cool kitsch* and the power of kitsch to influence art practice is undeniable. Following the male-dominated modernist era, a new pluralistic approach is being formed to discuss concepts such as beauty, style and taste. In this regard, "The distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture seems less and less meaningful" according to Sontag.²⁶ The loud music and the multicolored, festive and inclusive visuality created by the three artists and collectives whose works are included in this section, slowly begin to break down the walls built by modernism.

Pierre et Gilles, the artist duo consisting of Pierre Commoy and Gilles Blanchard, incorporate photography and painting to create multi-layered works based on studio photographs of their friends or famous figures. Combining images of popular culture with quotations from art history, the artists use a visual language that glorifies the *camp* aesthetics of queer culture and emphasizes gender fluidity. *Flowers and Tears* (2016), one of the works in the exhibition, depicts *showgirl* and diva Lolly Wish in a glamorous and iconic pose among pink and purple flowers wearing a stage costume. *Magical Mirror* (2015) portrays fashion designer Olivier Rousteing staring at himself in a gilded mirror. *Icarus, Leading Bird* (2013), on the other hand, presents a portrait of dancer Jonathan Forte Scannapieco, inspired by Icarus, whose wings are believed to be burning because he flew close to the Sun in Greek mythology. Artists transform figures from the world of fashion, pop culture and entertainment industry into subjects of their artistic practice in large, multicolored, floral and beaded portraits.

Since 1992, artist and dancer Nick Cave has been designing costumes that he calls, *Soundsuit* [Sound-clothes] that make a sound when worn. The artist, who produced his first Sound-suit in Los Angeles as an act of resistance against the police beating of black activist Rodney King, has designed over 500 costumes to date. Hiding the wearer's body completely, these costumes render signs of identity such as race, gender and class invisible. These costumes, produced by the artist using everyday materials such as feathers, beads, hair, and plastic buttons, allow us to think about art and craft together. Cave's *Drive-By* (2011),

* "A big celebration" in
144 Turkish queer slang.

where costumes transform into performances, presents figures dancing freely in the middle of nowhere, accompanied by music. The artist creates a fictional world through sequences that are sometimes slowed down, and sometimes accelerated, and where various figures roll, jump or fall from the sky. This multicultural and inclusive world takes an enthusiastic stance against the white, minimalist and modernist aesthetic.

Hayırlı Evlat's work titled *Bırak Kendini* [Let Yourself Go] (2019) is a pop song and video inspired by Sinop, the happiest city in Turkey according to survey results. Judging by the responses given to most of the questions posed by Hayırlı Evlat to the residents of Sinop, this statistic, despite being useful for tourism companies, does not reflect reality. Still, some residents think they are more peaceful when compared to residents of other cities across Turkey. The artist who describes happiness as "a soft resistance" within the political climate of Turkey, makes references to the fake happiness featured in advertising images in this video, which starts on a beach, and moves to the forest to a game table to a dinner with raki, where the acting is exaggerated. The empty promises of repetitive political discourses blend in with the wind along with chorus sung together by the performers, the accompanying choreography and the blues and greens of the background. Hayırlı Evlat transforms this form of popular culture, namely, the music video to create more inclusive representations, drawing attention to the dysfunctional or problematic areas of the system.

Internet

The most important development for the dissemination of mass culture is undoubtedly the beginning of the widespread use of the internet in the 1990s. In this regard, as we move from material culture to post-internet visual culture, we notice that a dialogue has developed between the two, which still continues. While the visuals from the physical world are multiplied by digital sharing, a subculture of digital images is concurrently being formed through GIFs and memes shared on the internet. GIF, which stands for Graphics Interchange Format, can be described as a visual storage format. These images, which are being disseminated – and sometimes simultaneously being forgotten – at an incredible speed, form a real community between the users. For instance, knowing the meaning of a popular image on Reddit might mean that one can be a member of this almost irrelevant, genderless, ageless community. The power of mass culture that is being shaped and disseminated on the internet is directly related to contemporary art: works that incorporate elements from the internet are evaluated under the term post-internet.²⁷ The nostalgic visual language that continuously references old habits of the internet, and these silvery flowers, which have a direct connection with kitsch, corresponds with the identity of the digital that does not seek reality. Artist James Bridle's concept of "the new aesthetic," speaks of the appearance of the visual language of these digital formations in the physical world, and the blending of virtual and physical.²⁸ Perhaps because reality is not sought in the new aesthetics of the digital, the ascent of the artificial or the fake on the internet can be much faster: if kitsch is a concept associated with falsity, could emojis be considered kitsch because they replace words? The visual archive on digital platforms is infiltrating reality everyday, and this can even become a determining factor for the fashion of certain plastic surgeries. This section contains three video works directly related to internet culture.

Titled after the lyrics of Lionel Richie's song, *Hello*, the video, *Is It Me You're Looking for?* (2014) is by artist Miao Ying. In the video, Richie plays an art teacher, whose visually impaired student creates a sculpture portraying him and uses the sculpture to declare her love for Richie, saying, "This is the way I see you." The artist draws a parallel between her relationship with the internet in China and the relationship between the visually-impaired woman in the video and Lionel Richie. Internet censorship in China is the most extensive in the world: Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are among the popular platforms that are not accessible in

China. The video, which deals with this situation that has resulted in phrases such as, “Great Firewall of China” or neologisms such as “Chinternet,” incorporates GIFs created from the screenshots of various censored pages, and Chinese internet poems such as, “To be missed is another kind of beauty” and “When cigarettes fall in love with matches the cigarettes get burned.” The kitsch typefaces fed by the visual culture on the internet and the 80s romance of Lionel Richie, framed within YouTube, are expressions of the artist’s admiration for the internet despite ongoing practices of censorship in China.

Cameron Askin’s work titled, *Cameron’s World* (1994-2009) is a web-collage project bringing together images and texts from the GeoCities web hosting service, which was established in 1994. GeoCities was an actively used service, which let people create and publish websites for free and made it easy to browse such user-created websites by their themes. By the time of its termination there were at least 38 million pages displayed by the service. *Cameron’s World* brings together thousands of iconic archival material from this rich resource: “under construction” signs, Furby GIFs, glitter roses, neon planets, those seeking lovers and dramatic quotes. The video, which presents details from the most intimate corners of the internet, presents a realistic impression of the visual culture of that period. On the Geocities platform, which provided free access to all users, it was possible to come across highly detailed pages where people freely expressed their creativity. Today, the visuality of the internet has a simpler language that serves commercial purposes, directs us to the content we are accustomed to without letting us get lost in different worlds and is thus more akin to our physical world. In the artist’s words, *Cameron’s World* is “A love letter to the internet of the old”.

Producing the most iconic examples of post-internet art, Olia Lialina’s video, titled **Treasure Trove** (2017) is a collage of GIFs on the Blingee platform. Blingee is a platform that offers users tools that allow them to add glitter flowers, hearts, jewels or animated text to their images and turns them into fun GIFs. On this platform, which has become an important building block of “digital folklore”, users can move from one image to another through blingee’s and stamps. Bringing together 440 jewel animations provided on the platform, **Treasure Trove** also investigates the transition from early animated GIFs to the gemstone GIFs of the post-2000s through these images that shine, dance and revolve around themselves. Deeming the internet-specific visual language that includes cat photographs, bright glittery objects, and gradient rainbows, which are created by the users themselves, as an element of “low culture,” and ultimately ignoring this language would also mean overlooking a very important aspect of contemporary visual culture. **Treasure Trove** draws attention to this culturally rich world of the internet.

An Inclusive Future

Milan Kundera claims, “No matter how we scorn it, kitsch is an integral part of the human condition”²⁹

in his widely acclaimed book, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, written in 1984. Monica Kjellman-Chapin, who has recently prepared an anthology on kitsch, shares a similar view: “Due to the ever-transforming, context-driven, and experience-bound nature of kitsch, its continuing relevance is all but assured. One might argue that today we have reached a kind of taste reversal as far as kitsch is concerned.”³⁰ Some argue that kitsch reaches the level of beauty by conceptualizing ugliness and vulgarity, while some claim that it opens up space for itself by challenging the definition of beauty. Regardless of its methods, kitsch continues to impress its viewer by infiltrating the system through its cracks. Today, non-hierarchical relationships can be established between various tastes, just as different tastes can often come together. In this regard, Vivien Philizot provides examples such as watching a Tarkovsky movie while eating McDonald’s or going to karaoke after eating at a Michelin-starred restaurant.³¹

Today, as the boundaries between “high art” and “mass culture” become blurred, contemporary art, which leaves its masculine and elitist history behind and gets equipped with inclusive and queer-feminist reflexes, offers important clues to interpret visual culture. Sander van Zanten and Marel Cobussen argue that, “The distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ art could, and can never be, objectively determined. All the same, it is not an entirely subjective matter: it is the subject of an ongoing debate in which essentially everyone can participate. You can most certainly argue about taste!”³² In this era when diversity, ambiguity, and ineffability are sanctified, can kitsch be a tool to carry these values forward? Could thinking about avant-garde and kitsch side-by-side rather than in opposition — by looking closely at contemporary art’s relations with the collective aspects of mass culture, rather than considering mass culture as unsubstantial, banal and inferior, and trying to explore the ties between them — agitate the existing structure of class society? Is it possible to define taste as something other than an indicator of class? *A Question of Taste* aims to open the subject of taste up for discussion, toward a more inclusive future.

- ¹ Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 97-98.
- ² Herman Broch, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, ed. Gillo Dorfles (London: Studio Vista Limited, 1969), p. 49-76.
- ³ Walter Benjamin, Winfried Menninghaus, "On the Vital Significance of 'Kitsch': Walter Benjamin's Politics of 'Bad Taste,'" *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), p. 39-58.
- ⁴ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 3-21.
- ⁵ Martha Rosler, "Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism, Part I," *e-flux journal*, no. 21 (December 2010), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67676/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-i/>.
- ⁶ Umberto Eco, "The Structure of Bad Taste," translated by Anna Cancogni and David Robey. *The Open Work*. (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 187
- ⁷ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'", *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 17.
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 25-30.
- ⁹ Ibid, p. 33.
- ¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 110-111.
- ¹¹ Matei Calinescu, [Five Faces of Modernity]. *Modernliğin Beş Yüzü*, trans. Sabri Gürses (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2017), p. 256.
- ¹² Ibid, p. 258.
- ¹³ Ibid, p. 251-286.
- ¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984).
- ¹⁵ Ali Artun, "Kitsch, Pop ve Eleştirinin Anlamsızlaşması," *Çağdaş Sanatın Örgütlenmesi – Estetik Modernizmin Tasfiyesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), p. 27-54.
- ¹⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Taste*, trans. Cooper Francis (Pennsylvania: Seagull Books, 2017), p. 8.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, p. 66.
- ¹⁸ Louise Schouwenberg, "Innovation as a Premise of Art and Design Education," *Material Utopias* (Amsterdam: Sternberg Press, 2017), p. 37.
- ¹⁹ Ruth Holliday and Tracey Potts, *Kitsch: Cultural Politics and Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 244.
- ²⁰ Chus Martinez interview with Can Altay, Ahali, podcast, 13 November 2020, <https://www.ahali.space/episodes/episode-9-marianapestana-68hbd>.
- ²¹ Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 14.
- ²² Ibid, p. 276.
- ²³ Andreas Huyssen, [Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other]. "Kadın Olarak Kitle Kültürü: Modernizmin Ötekisi," *Eğlence İncelemeleri*, ed. Tania Modleski, trans. Nurdan Gürbilek (İstanbul: Metis, 2016), p. 257-281.
- ²⁴ Ibid, p. 257-281.
- ²⁵ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'", *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1966).
- ²⁶ Susan Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility", *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (New York: Dell Pub., 1966), p. 51.
- ²⁷ The rather ambiguous term post-Internet art, coined by artist Marisa Olson, refers to works that are driven by digital networks, but can be produced in various media or take physical forms. These works that take the Internet as source material were described as "Internet aware" by the artist Guthrie Lonergan. Regine Debatty, "Interview with Marisa Olson," we make money not art, March 28, 2008, https://we-make-money-not-art.com/how_does_one_become_marisa/.
- ²⁸ James Bridle, "The New Aesthetic and its Politics," *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester & London: Cornerhouse ve SPACE, 2014), p. 20-27.
- ²⁹ Milan Kundera, [The Unbearable Lightness of Being] *Varolmanın Dayanılmaz Hafifliği*, trans. Fatih Özgüven (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1986), p. 263.
- ³⁰ Monica Kjellman-Chapin, "Introduction," *Kitsch: History, Theory and Practice*, ed. Monica Kjellman-Chapin (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. ix-xxiii.

³¹ Vivien Philizot, "Kitsch, Bad Taste, Scheiße. Aesthetics of Dissonance," *Azimuts*, no. 42 (2015): pp. 108-135, <https://revue-azimuts.fr/numeros/42>.

³² Sander van Zanten and Marel Cobussen, "Innovation as a Premise of Art and Design Education," Louise Schouwenberg ed., *Material Utopias* (Amsterdam: Sternberg Press, 2017), p. 37.