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Max Rynnänen

Aalto University, max.ryynanen@aalto.fi

Anna-Sofia Sysser

annasofias@gmail.com

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Making Sense of 'Tropical' Kitsch

Max Ryyänen, Anna-Sofia Sysser

Abstract

The 'tropical' has not just been "imported" to Northern spas and travel agency advertisements. Plastic palm trees and inflatable pineapples echo tourism experiences, have roots in "feel-good" Americana, and belong to colonial imagery. The tropical is often portrayed in simplified ways, even though there is a huge diversity of cultures, inhabitants and landscapes within the tropical zone. Could the concept of kitsch help us to understand the construct of the tropical? Could the 'tropical' help us to understand kitsch? If one takes away the nearly deceased modern conception of kitsch as pretentious pseudo-art and concentrates on sentimental and/or sugared knickknacks – another meaning of kitsch – *tropical kitsch* appears as quite a central phenomenon in the world of kitsch. The origins of modern kitsch have a connection to early souvenirs and cherished exotic objects. Does tropical kitsch have a far larger role in the Western imagination and culture than we have realized? In the Global North, where bright, sunny colors are mostly absent, we might eventually also start to see tropical kitsch as filling a need/hole in the cultural system.

Key Words

color; everyday aesthetics; kitsch; popular culture; rubber; tropical; tropicity

1. Introduction

"Describe a 1950s Palm Springs poolside cocktail party using only emojis, and you capture the aesthetic of summer 2017. The colours are pink and green (a flamingo with a palm tree, a

watermelon slice). The shapes – pineapple, cactus, Martini glass – are as sunnily evocative and as easy to draw as a smiley face. Move over industrial chic bare bricks and copper pendant lights, because we are living in the Age of the Pineapple.”[1]

“The tropics, then, have long been the site for European fantasies of self-realization, projects of cultural imperialism, or the politics of human or environmental salvage. In the postcolonial world, these fantasies have if anything become more pervasive, if distinctly less enchanting.”[2]

Not only a geographical term, ‘tropical’ is a construct and a label applied in various aesthetic and commercial contexts. It has influenced contemporary aesthetic experience both conceptually and materially, and it has a greater role in the Western imagination than we might notice. In his essay *Little History of Photography*, Walter Benjamin writes about a photograph of Franz Kafka. In the image, Kafka, six years old, stands in a winter garden, palms behind him, and “a tropical hat” (as Benjamin writes) in his hand.[3] In his *Tristes Tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss mentions his collecting of “exotics” from early childhood as one explanatory background for his interest in cultural anthropology, a practice that became elevated after meeting the linguist Roman Jakobson, which led to his study of structural similarities between different civilizations.[4] The tropical was not a mainstream phenomenon in the Renaissance and neither did it affect enlightenment Europe in any significant way, but since the early days of modern media, tourism, and mass culture, the tropical has been constructed as a particular and very visual phenomenon.[5] The King of kitsch art, Jeff Koons, produced large, colorful (beach) flowers already in the late 1970s and continued in the 2000s to produce, for example, polychromed aluminum statues that looked like inflatable objects – portraying, for example, lobsters.[6]

Kitschy, mass-produced “echoes” of original exotics unite more than distinguish cultures. As we know today, “exotics” brought from distant places are far less often produced at their site of “origin” than was the case in Lévi-Strauss’s childhood. Goethe’s father had acquired a miniature gondola that was one source of inspiration for his Italian journey (1768-88). Goethe, himself, met already *fake* antiques produced for tourists when he finally reached Italy. Today the same miniature gondolas are mass-produced in tropical/subtropical Taiwan.[7]

Mass-produced symbols of Central and Southern European culture, like the miniature torero (bullfighter) or Pisa’s leaning tower, are one typical genre of kitsch objects, often neat and decorative and meant to be beautiful. This array of objects sits

neatly in traditional kitsch theories, where kitsch is often attacked as a pretentious aesthetic lie.[8] When it comes to the 'tropical', we mostly, at least today, face banal products, often large in size and not really meant to cherish bourgeois, sentimental respect, or nostalgia for cultural tradition but to accentuate pastime, non-seriousness, and easy pleasures.

In this article we attempt to give a brief description of a phenomenon that has not, so far as we know, been theoretically discussed: tropical kitsch. It is surprisingly absent even in kitsch research, although we see its products everywhere. Of course, one reason may be that kitsch, in the end, is a concept coined in non-colonial Germany, where the discourse on it developed to be far more complicated and illuminative than the discourse on, for example, the more bourgeois French *camelot* or Spanish *cursi*, so that, in the end, kitsch became the international key word for bad taste and sentimental and sugary, mass-produced or fake artistic products. Would these early competitors have had more to say about tropicality?[9]

The history of tropical kitsch, dating back at least partly to the early modern collecting of "exotic" souvenirs and peculiarities imported from colonies to the colonial West, like England and France, still lingers strongly with the product history of kitsch. Even a brief description of the subject matter shows how present tropical kitsch is in the Western lifestyle, even though it may be a blind spot for many. Most of today's tropical kitsch is easygoing and banal, colorful and made of synthetic materials, most often plastic. Here, we attempt to give an account of the basic materials, colors, and uses of tropical kitsch but also ask if there is a reason why it has stayed so popular throughout the decades. Does tropical kitsch fulfill a need that is somehow not taken care of in the culture of the Global North and the West?

We start from discussing "The tropical," in section 2, below, to get to grips with the 'tropical' background of the products, and we continue with section 3, "A brief history of kitsch (with an eye on the tropical)," to sketch out the classification of objects where tropical kitsch recedes. In section 4, "Why tropical kitsch?," at the end of our text, we discuss the potentials and resources of the practice of using tropical kitsch. It looks like although tropical kitsch has sometimes suspicious (colonial) roots and its nature is banal, it might have a productive role in the whole, at least in the culture of the Global North, where for example certain colors are mainly missing. However, our text is not really a defense of it but more of a curious inquiry into a topic that we have increasingly started to see as surprisingly central in our culture.

2. The 'tropical'

Exploring supermarkets and holiday destinations in Northern Europe and North America reveals multiple products and places labeled 'tropical'. Our day might begin with 'tropical' fruit muesli (the package featuring pineapples and mangos in sugary colors), continue with a Saturday spent in a spa (surrounded by plastic palm trees and turquoise pools) and end with a pink drink called a Tropical Sunset (with tiny parasols and flamingo-shaped swizzle sticks). The amount and variety (and aesthetic conformity) of these commodities and sites (spas, gardens, zoos, restaurants, and so on) are surprisingly large, when one starts to think about it. A look at the material and visual modes they operate in reveal a selected and often simplified set of symbols that keep recurring with the tropical that we will dive into a little later in this article.

If the commercial image of the tropical is often a condensed one, defining the tropical is not that simple, as the tropical and the tropics are factually and conceptually multidimensional. Most often the tropical is defined primarily in geographical terms: the tropics as the region of Earth on either side of the equator between the two lines of latitude, the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.[10] This is a highly varied area in terms of landscapes, inhabitants, and life in general, as forty percent of the world's population and eighty-five percent of animal and plant biodiversity exist in the tropics.[11] But the tropical also possesses many more connotations than just the purely geographical. As historian David Arnold argues, the tropics "need to be understood as a conceptual, and not just a physical space".[12]

In the Western context, tropical constructions and representations have a centuries-long history shaped by colonialism.[13] We will now briefly visit the concept of tropicality to understand how ideas of the tropics were formed and the tropical came to be represented.[14] Tropicality refers to an exoticizing way of thinking, a discourse in which the tropics are constructed as the environmental Other of the Western world.[15] Throughout the development of Western European imperialism until today, this discourse has evolved around fixed features and dichotomies informed by high and popular culture, in addition to imperial and scientific practices. In the European world view, the tropical world was depicted most often through its nature and between two opposites: either as paradise, with Edenic islands and rich vegetation, or as hell, with diseases and storms.[16] As Felix Driver and Luciana Martins write, "(t)he contrast between the temperate and the tropical is one of the

most enduring themes in the history of global imaginings. ... tropicality has frequently served as a foil to temperate nature, to all that is modest, civilized, cultivated.”[17] In this view, the tropical is seen as inferior to the temperate.

Even though there is an aim to “displace a temperate-centric, colonial-interested discourse of the ‘tropics/tropical’”[18] in certain academic discussions, commodity advertising and tourist iconography are still shaped by images of tropical difference. [19] One of these represented key differences is heat. As sociologist Chua Beng Huat notes, ‘tropical’ narrowly signifies hot weather.[20] This heat connects both the tropical constructions and images of the tropics more widely. Arnold argues that the hot and wet tropics most typically represent tropicality, in Western minds, even though climatically the tropics are more varied, also including dry savannahs and alpine areas.[21]

The symbols that represent the tropical most commonly in the Western consumer’s visual realm are easy to perceive and fast to list: the palm tree; ‘tropical’ fruits (pineapple, bananas, oranges); a flamingo; a cocktail glass with a tiny parasol; deck chairs; turquoise water; white, sandy beaches; sun; bright colors; and “exotic” flowers, like hibiscus or orchids. In addition, there might be some animal symbols portrayed, such as parrots, monkeys, tigers, or dolphins. Tropical sites portray natural environments, most often beaches or jungles, not cities or houses, except the occasional palm shack or tiki bar hut. Nearly no signs of humans or cultures, beyond the shacks, huts, and parasols, are to be found in these constructions.[22] The point of view is clear: It is the vacationer’s eyes that gaze on the palm trees, and the visitor’s body that bathes in the warm water, be it in a spa in Finnish Lapland or a resort in the Maluku islands in Indonesia.

Plastic plants, wave machines, heating systems, cocktail swizzle sticks, imported fruits, *Tropical Holiday* tee shirts—this whole web of machinery and accessories creates a recognizable aesthetics that also portrays and maintains the tropical outside the tropical belt. The feeling of artificiality and the cheesiness that characterizes these materializations link them to kitsch.

3. A brief history of kitsch (with an eye on the tropical)

The modern system of arts united and institutionalized the aesthetic hobbies of Central European upper-class men (dance, painting, architecture, and so on) during the eighteenth century into a cluster of practices that codified their most appreciated aesthetic cultures.[23] The democratization of Central European

culture led to the fact that modern artists often lacked both an upper-class background and patronage. They started struggling with the fact that their work did not lead to commercial success as much as the popular artists' work did. As the art system had to build identity pretty much from scratch, artists and connoisseurs needed an enemy. Entertainment and the early forms of what was to become modern mass culture (variety, circus, interior design) were used in mirroring the role of artist, for example, in paintings showing prostitutes, clowns and waiters during the impressionist period.[24]

The Central European concept—or more precisely, the originally Bavarian concept—of kitsch, which has its root in the mockeries of pretentious taste, from Petronius' novel *Satyricon* (circa 60 CE) to the way Don Quixote is presented by Miguel de Cervantes as a reader with bad taste who messed up his head by reading too many knight novels, became the polarizing counterpart for art. In the beginning, kitsch referred to basically all types of bogus commercial arts.[25] Mass production and the growing leisure culture made the phenomenon stronger in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kitsch drifted into the center of culture, and it was not long before the educated bourgeois started to manifest their taste with a hunger to elevate themselves culturally above the poor and the “uncivilized.”[26]

Kitsch is a two-sided concept. The concept, which seems to have been born in the 1860s,[27] long denoted pseudo-art, for example, pretentious bourgeois painting. It was and sometimes still is actively used to debase bad art, cheap sentimentality, and, for instance, commercial, aesthetically populist painting. [28] Right from the beginning, kitsch also had a side that referred to knickknacks, small trivial articles and ornaments. This side became stronger quite late, though, and we find small tourist objects, for example, discussed throughout Tomas Kulka's *Kitsch and Art* (1996; orig. Czech version 1994),[29] but not much before that.[30] At this point it seems that the knickknack tradition described above finally nearly fully took over the concept of kitsch, which in the beginning had been reserved more for pretentious (but not really rewarding) art.

A lot has been said about kitsch's qualities, but due to the lack of taxonomies or studies on the diversity of phenomena we call kitsch – usually kitsch scholars have picked up one type of kitsch, like cheesy pseudo art, and then analyzed its nature – it suffices, maybe, to say here that Kathleen Higgins, who concentrates on sentimental, saccharine kitsch that flirts with the boundaries of art and that refers to cultural archetypes

somewhat iconically, writes about the way (some) kitsch becomes easily confused with (real) beauty,[31] Karsten Harries focuses on bad art (not knickknacks) and discusses the way the history of kitsch painting, and its “cloying sweetness” connects to the longings of the sentimental bourgeois,[32] and Robert Solomon defends sentimental kitsch (a large niche of kitsch is about sleazy sentimentality).[33]

None of these remarks work in the context of banal tropical kitsch, though. This might partly have to do with late changes in the use of the concept. At the turn of the millennium, kitsch became increasingly connected to certain colors (pink), materials (porcelain), and sensibilities (cheesiness and sugary). The old way of using the concept often accentuated an overtly serious, pretentious use of the concept, typical for “wannabe artists,” while the concept was now often used as a positive one, something closer to camp, like a concept reserved for intellectually non-reflective objects labeled female.[34] Celeste Olalquiaga’s *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience*, while discussing the increasing aura of historical memorabilia (for example. “exotics”) and interior trivia, contextually traces the history of the more exotic objects to the nineteenth-century World Expos and the colonial endeavors that produced interest toward the far-away.[35] Tourist kitsch has had its role in texts on kitsch since Greenberg’s “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” but there are no views that it should, in itself, be considered separately from other forms of kitsch.

In one of the key books of tourism studies, *The Tourist Gaze*, by John Urry (1990), while corporeal embodiment and encounters (race, gender, age) of tourists and locals are discussed, the topic of the tropical is also raised. Urry writes:

There are [...] complex connections between bodily sensations and socio-cultural ‘sensescapes’ mediated by discourse and language. This can be seen in the case of much of tropical travel such as to the Caribbean where the early visitors were able to taste new fruits, to smell the flowers, to feel the heat of the sun, to immerse one’s body in the moist greenery of the rainforest, as well as to see new sights.[36]

If the Romantic writers and philosophers had started the visual possession of nature and landscapes, Urry notes that “tropical nature” entered this “game” in the nineteenth century during the expansion of mass tourism.[37] The tropics then became, and still are, a romanticized destination to break from Western modernities, fulfilling a yearning for more “primitive,” “natural” ways of life.[38]

While furry wolves and miniature reindeer make up the cheesy mass production of nature in the products created about Lapland for tourists (actually even 700 miles south of Lapland), the colorful flowers and fruits mentioned by Urry, especially the pineapple, are at the heart of the commercial representations of the tropical in Northern Europe and they have their role in Americana, too. Orvar Löfgren's *On Holiday* (1999) describes, in detail, how the interest in landscapes, Lidos (in the 1920s, following the Venice beach culture), art deco (beach) architecture, and the palm images of tourist agencies became commonplace in Western lifestyle after the mid-twentieth century.[39] It is hard to nail when the connection of kitsch production (and sensitivity) and tropicality became as strong as it is now. But it is clear that here, somehow, the colonial thirst for others through material culture, discussed by Olalquiaga; the tourist gaze and tourist industry, fueled by cheaper flying; and the way kitsch was and still is the place where colors, glitter, and naive phantasmas of paradisiac happiness come together.[40]

4. Why tropical kitsch?

What is formally interesting in the juxtaposition of these elements is that at least contemporary tropical kitsch is less about grace and beauty than, for example, the miniature bull fighters brought from Spain or the miniature gondolas brought from Venice. Most palm trees and flamingos or pineapples are somewhat openly banal, more rubberish than the aforementioned objects. They echo, of course, the beach (holiday) as much as the colorful drinks with fruit slices and parasols. Their essence is in producing the image of relaxing on a "tropical island" mappable more in the imagination than in reality. These sunny images form the typical 'tropical' color palette. The tropical is not usually pictured with primary colors or greyscales, but with sun faded tones: orange, turquoise, green, yellow and pink. The materials used in tropical kitsch are often durable, disposable, waterproof, light and cheap, depending on the use. A dolphin statue in a spa is fiberglass, not marble, everlasting indoor flowers are polyester, not silk, and the 'tropical' scented candle is made with synthetic perfumes, not essential oils. Sugared colors with lowbrow materials connect more to animations than to real life, or to the traditional arts and crafts that are so often the reference of kitsch knickknacks. Material-wise, these products or elements are easy to maintain, put up, and take down. Plastic survives the humidity often present in spa-like environments, a garland with 'tropical' symbols cut from paper is meant for an instant "party feel" for even the average room, and an inflatable pineapple air mattress is easily folded back to wait for the next holiday.

One could also say that tropical kitsch is less gendered than most kitsch, which is easily a slur on pink porcelain and the kind of mass-produced culture we associate with female culture.[41] If pink porcelain objects are “female stuff,” the rubber pineapple and the plastic palm are just loose and light in atmosphere, without any pretentiousness, gender, or attempts to elevate something to be appreciated by the petty bourgeois, which would be typical, for example, of the use of a neatly shaped bullfighter or the miniature gondola. In this sense, the kitschy feeling represents a less-discussed kitsch sensitivity that is less about class anxiety—the aspiration to touch upon cultural history and art through consumerism. Without doubt, while a lot of kitsch is too neat to be fun, tropical kitsch is nearly always camp, too, and it connects to laid-back culture and laughter. It is also lighter in its generic nature. The palm tree symbol is not of any specific species of palm, the flamingo can be recognized as a flamingo but often more a cartoon version of it, the sand is “just” sand... Detached from their origins they become just icons, without really much reference, losing all connections to originality. The inflatable palm tree refers conceptually to beaches and the idea of the tropical, and the palm itself is both generic and connected to the historical thread of sentimental colonial objects and souvenirs.

The notion of paradise is essential to how the tropical is represented, especially in commercial use. The visual and material manifestations of the tropical most commonly imply something exotic, positive, and appealing to the senses. For the northern consumer, the tropics are still served up as paradisiacal, as an oasis that breaks the everyday routine.[42] When the interior designers of spas aspire to create a paradisiac atmosphere or maybe more often just hint it (even ironically; tropical kitsch is not very serious), they bring out tropical kitsch as much as shops do when they want to sell juices, ice creams, and mueslis with an “exotic” flavor. As “tropical fruits” are real fruits, just framed as tropical, it is the rubber and plastic objects that are the most visible if we think of the category of kitsch.

Depending on the area, it might be more about Americana, French colonies, or Dutch colonies, but surely, as the US dominates mass culture, and nearly every mafia film shows the protagonists traveling at least once to Florida (putting on Hawaii shirts) to establish a restaurant (for money laundering), Americana’s role in even European and global tropical kitsch is also without doubt large. The products are today, though, the same, with maybe just the flamingo standing out as a typically American treat.

Anyway, tropical kitsch has a surprisingly large role in (northern) Western consumer culture and everyday esthetics, and we hope that exploring these examples has made us more aware of this. Like Arto Haapala has pointed out, the familiarity is what makes the everyday so hard to penetrate philosophically. We hardly notice the cultural existence of inflatable bananas and colorful tee shirts depicting tropical lagoons, as they have become commonplace in the everyday.^[43] The products are mostly and also absolutely everyday-ish by their very nature, that is, not leaning towards anything else than basic leisure and easygoing beautification of the everyday.

But why write about tropical kitsch? We feel that it is important to attend to this kind of existing phenomenon. The more one thinks about it, the tag 'tropical' surrounds lives in an interesting auxiliary way in the Global North and still seems unnoticed by many. Looking at nearly any northern city, houses have moderate colors, and clothes, too—and they even include a lot of gray and black—and only the occasional banana advertisement, with a woman in a colorful dress in a sunny landscape, or the cover of a tropical yogurt adds simple and bright colors to the everyday landscape.

Tropical kitsch is quite central to Western leisure, not just for the Global North—we know that its imagery and conceptualizations have also been adopted by the Global South, even by people of tropical territories—and thus begs at least scholarly attention. One can see advertisements in southern India selling "exotic" fruit—northern berries should be exotic for that area—and tropicality in South Asia and South America is an echo of the way the more northern colonial cluster of countries (England, Spain, France, Holland, and so on) viewed these places. To find colonial kitsch there, double-coded, and to understand its role is a very different issue that we will not go into here, but that we hope someone will study and discuss in the areas where this cultural juxtaposition is part of everyday culture. The same applies to colonial countries. Representing the Global North but the part that did not colonize the South, we live in the midst of tropical kitsch, which is an imported cultural practice and stems at least partly from the way we are overshadowed by Anglo-American culture; for us, Club Tropicana is quite a Club Americana. We have still thought that its success everywhere at least partly comes from its fun nature and the materials and colors that are otherwise lacking in our context. But the topic also needs more analysis from the point of view of those who bear the heritage of colonialism. Is it the same thing in Birmingham or Rotterdam? We cannot really answer this question.

What we think is that most people are okay with this type of kitsch and that most of us have some tropical kitsch at home. When we go swimming, we take the 1.5-meter inflatable banana with us. In the spa, we do not think much when we swim in the shadow of simple plastic palms, that are not as elegant as the ones we see in the reception areas of banks. We drink piña coladas in the shadow of artificial plastic tropical trees adorned with plastic fruit. Even if this is material that we react to as kitsch, somehow we have not heard people criticize it in the way people criticize sentimental kitsch, for example, kitschy novels or pretentious home decoration. Laid-back tropical kitsch might be a territory inside the world of kitsch that somehow does not often raise negative reactions, although most of us would, with no problem, label it as kitsch, a concept which has traditionally raised eyebrows.

A certain colorful, banal, and soft rubberish side of material culture has somewhat been pushed to spas, beaches, night clubs, and other venues, where we can fulfill our needs for that side of life too. Many of us cannot go to work in too easy, colorful clothes in New York or Berlin, but we have this margin of culture where we can do different things. At the same time, it is important to be aware where the roots of this imagery lie and to keep in mind that the ideal picture that tropical kitsch might portray does not represent the actual tropics. The Singaporean sociologist Chua argues that, in the Western imagination, the tropics are a place of "romance," with perfect weather conditions offering an "escape" from life in the West.[44] Currently, awareness of the environmental challenges facing our planet has also shaped Western conceptions of the tropical, but does it affect the way we experience tropical kitsch? Do we start to see plastic palm trees or inflatable flamingos as symbols of over-consumption instead of holiday icons? Could tropical kitsch even make us question or reflect upon the way extensive traveling is fetishized? And, one could, of course, ask: If aesthetic theory has so far not had much connection to really banal culture (the closest we have come is camp, but even there the main texts talk pretty much about less banal and, we would say, quite sentimental kitsch issues, for example, Susan Sontag discusses Tiffany lamps and the singer La Lupe), could a gaze turned to the direction of colorful tropical kitsch challenge the discipline to take new steps towards unknown territories?[45] Banal tropical kitsch is not a challenger of beauty, and neither is it about an attempt to elevate the user socially or class-wise. It is simple. It lacks pretentiousness, and it brings joy to people. It is actually quite interesting that this type of simple and banal beauty has yet to be much discussed in aesthetic theory. Kitsch

seems to provide a possible bridge to do it, especially as the concept is no longer simply negative.

Most tropical kitsch does not feel negative from a postcolonial perspective, although some of its visual history is related to early modern colonial commerce and politics, and so it cannot be seen as simply just a negative phenomenon in the Global North. It is relatively harmless and a territory in kitsch which is not noticeably sexist. It focuses traditionally on certain colors that the Global North mostly misses and uses them often.

Thinking about colors in Oslo, Warsaw, or Bratislava, it looks like the bright, sunny, fun material, associated with the tropics, is a special form of everyday culture, accentuating pastimes, feel-good, the right to be banal and relaxed, if one feels like it, and a certain form of escapism. One could even ask if tropical kitsch is helpful for emancipation, that is, emancipation from a critical, often nearly cynical culture that is partly and weirdly rooted in moderate colors, an intellectualist hate for banality, and the minimalist design ideologies of the Global North. Most of us do not want our monuments or key architectural sites to be made out of rubber and have bright colors, but we seem to not be very much against having this tropical kitsch margin in our culture.

Can one say that without tropical kitsch we would lack a great deal? We think so. As we have sketched out here, the idea of the tropical combined with kitsch production and sensitivity, and the way many of our aesthetic possibilities have been limited to this margin of everyday life, is a phenomenon to learn from. There are uncanny routes to be explored, if one wants to understand more about the way this phenomenon works in countries with a tropical colonial history (both sides of it), and, without doubt, there must be many ethical problems lurking in kitsch production, as we have noted. At the same time, we would like to highlight the aesthetic potential of the phenomenon, the way some parts of the color map live and thrive only there (at least in our culture), and the way, from an early age, we learn to play with it, spend time in it—the environmental aesthetics of tropical kitsch could offer a niche for further study—and consume it, as an integral, not-so-serious and not-too-negative part of the multilayered cluster of practices that make up our life in this era we live in.

Max Rynnänen
max.ryynanen@aalto.fi

Max Ryyänen is Senior University Lecturer (Tenured) at Aalto University, Finland. He is the editor-in-chief of *Popular Inquiry: The Journal of the Aesthetics of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture* (with Jozef Kovalcik) and *The Journal of Somaesthetics* (with Falk Heinrich and Richard Shusterman). His latest book is *On the Philosophy of Central European Art: The History of an Institution and Its Global Competitors* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020). Homepage: <http://maxryynanen.net>.

Anna-Sofia Sysser
annasofias@gmail.com

Anna-Sofia Sysser works as an artist-researcher through writing, documentary, performance and installation art. Sysser explores the topics of the artificial tropical and tropical representations in Finland. In 2020-2023 her work is funded by Kone Foundation. Homepage: <http://www.annasofiasysser.com>.

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Endnotes

[1] Jess Cartner-Morley, "Club Tropicana: Why Kitsch is Everywhere This Summer," *The Guardian*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/jul/26/club-tropicana-kitsch-everywhere-summer-pineapples-flamingos-inflatable-lobsters>.

[2] Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, "Views and Visions of the Tropical World," in *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, edited by Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 3-20.

[3] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 274-298.

[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Criterion Books, 1961), p. 57.

[5] See also Nancy Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

[6] See the page on Koons's inflatables on the website of the Whitney Museum of American Art:
<https://whitney.org/education/forteachers/teacherguides/jeffkoons>. Accessed 16 November 2020

See the lobster, together with, for example, a beach towel featuring a monkey, at the *Retrospective* exhibition (2005) page of the Helsinki City Art Museum:
<http://www.jeffkoons.com/exhibitions/solo/jeff-koons-retrospective-helsinki-2005>. Accessed 16 November 2020.

[7] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Italianische Reise* (Italian Journey) (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1976), p. 87; Robert C. Davis and Garry R. Marvin, *Venice, the Tourist Maze: A Critique of the World's Most Touristed City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 172.

[8] See, for example, Herman Broch, "Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst (The Evil in Art's Value System)," in *Texte zur Nietzsche-Rezeption 1873-1963*, edited by B. Hillebrand (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), pp. 87-106; and see also Matei Calinescu's great idea historical work on kitsch, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, and Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

[9] The conceptual history is, otherwise, well documented in Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*. *Camelot* also means vendor and *cursi* can refer to the petit-bourgeois, but both concepts used to be actively used (in France and respectively in Spain) about kitsch objects – and at least *cursi* is still used about bad (not necessarily only petit-bourgeois) taste ("your home is *cursi*").

[10] Storm Dunlop, *A Dictionary of Weather* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Chris Park and Michael Allaby, "Tropical," in *A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[11] *Tropical Data Hub*, James Cook University.
<https://tropicaldatahub.org>. Accessed 30.06.2020.

[12] David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 142.

- [13] Gavin Bowd and Daniel Clayton, *Impure and Worldly Geography: Pierre Gourou and Tropicality* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-36
- [14] For the concept, see Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*.
- [15] Ibid. See also Driver and Martins, eds, *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*.
- [16] Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, pp. 141-68; Bowd and Clayton, *Impure and Worldly Geography*, pp. 1-36
- [17] Driver and Martins, *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, p. 3.
- [18] Chua Beng Huat, "Tropics, City and Cinema: Introduction to the Special Issue on Cinematic Representation of the Tropical Urban/City," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 29, no 3 (2008), p. 4.
- [19] Felix Driver, "Tropicality," in *Dictionary of Human Geography (5th Edition)*, edited by Derek Gregory et al. (Malden: Blackwell, 2009), p. 777.
- [20] Chua, "Tropics, City and Cinema," p. 1.
- [21] Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, p. 142.
- [22] See Anna-Sofia Sysser, *Tropical Dreams. Representations of the Tropical in Finland* (Espoo: Aalto University, 2018).
- [23] Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," Part I, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12, No. 4 (Oct 1951); Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Six Ideas* (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1980); Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001). For the global outreach of the system (through colonialism and diaspora), see Max Rynänen, *On the Philosophy of Central European Art: The History of an Institution and Its Global Competitors* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020).
- [24] See, for example, Naomi Ritter, *Art as Spectacle: Images of Entertainment since Romanticism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
- [25] See Max Rynänen, "Contemporary Kitsch: The Death of Pseudo Art and the Birth of Everyday Cheesiness (A Postcolonial Inquiry)," *Terra Aestheticae*, No. 1, 2018: 1, p. 75.

[26] Larry Shiner claims that this happened in the late nineteenth century; Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, p. 95.

[27] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*.

[28] Clement Greenberg wrote with the old conception of kitsch, where kitsch was nearly everything between “authentic” art and “authentic” folk culture, but still focused (following his own interests?) a great deal on painting, like, for example, the work of Ilya Repin (whose work Greenberg took as an example of kitsch). Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism Vol 1*, edited by J. O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986 (orig. year of publication: 1939)), pp. 6-11. Also Kulka’s work focuses a great deal on painting, the original kitsch art – as the story tells us (see Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*), when tourists in Munich tried to buy “sketches” in the 1860s and the locals misunderstood the aspiration, partly based on their concepts of *kitschen* and *verkitschen* (to make new furniture out of old; to make something cheap; sometimes collecting trash (*kitschen*)).

[29] Tomas Kulka, *Kitsch and Art* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010). Kulka also mentions them in his earlier article on the topics: Tomas Kulka, “Kitsch,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28, No 1 (1988), pp. 18-27.

[30] For example, Umberto Eco mentions a tie in his “La struttura del cattivo gusto,” published as part of *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milano: Bompiani, 1964), but otherwise he discusses bad art. The text has been translated, but also changed a little, for *The Open Work* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[31] Kathleen Higgins, “Beauty and its Kitsch Competitors,” in *Beauty Matters*, edited by Peg Zeglin Brand (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 87-111.

[32] Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 75-77.

[33] Robert Solomon, “On Kitsch and Sentimentality,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 1, Winter 1991, pp. 1-14. Solomon claims that the overtly critical attitudes to kitsch stem from a cynical inability to tolerate emotions that are too sentimental or “sweet.” There are of course other noteworthy studies too, see e.g. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein’s “Kitsch and Bullshit,” *Philosophy & Literature*, Vol 39, No. 2, 2015, pp. 305-321; and Stephanie Brown’s witty gender-study “On Kitsch, Nostalgia, and Nineties Femininity,” *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 22, No. 3, 2000, pp. 39-54; Kathleen

Higgins, "Sweet Kitsch," in Philip Alperson, ed., *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 568-581; and, of course, Robert Solomon's defense of kitsch's sentimental side, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 1, Winter 1991, pp. 1-14.

[34] C.E. Emmer, "Kitsch Against Modernity," *Art Criticism*, 13, No. 1 (1980), pp. 53-80; See also Ryyänen, "Contemporary Kitsch," p. 80.

[35] Celeste Olalquiaga, *The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[36] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990), p. 148.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] Bowd and Clayton, *Impure and Worldly Geography*, pp. 15-16.

[39] Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[40] Besides Urry and Löfgren (partly here also Olalquiaga), there are many works in tourism studies that touch upon the topic. See, for example, Ljiljana Kosar and Nicolina Kosar, "Kitsch and Camp in Hotel Industry," *Quaestus: Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2012, pp. 47-54. Kosar and Kosar focus a lot on interior design and its kitschy, and partly also, interestingly here, its banal sides.

[41] See Emmer, "Kitsch Against Modernity"; Ryyänen, "Contemporary Kitsch," p. 80-82.

[42] See Sysser, *Tropical Dreams*, 10-47.

[43] Haapala, Arto. "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, edited by Light Andrew and Smith Jonathan M., pp. 39-55 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[44] Chua, "Tropics, City and Cinema," p. 4.

[45] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Vintage, 1966), pp. 275-292.

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