

HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

Master thesis:

**The Good,
The Bad
and The Ugly Artist.**

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Abstract:

Through critical theories and surveys, the essay is exploring what is written or said about the living and working conditions for artists in Denmark in the 2000s and 2010s. By reflecting on the difficult question of who or what is considered to be a *good* visual artist, the aim of the essay is not discussing the hypothetical question regarding the quality or definition of good art. Instead, the essay tries to point out the choices, the values or the political stand, from a Danish point of view, that categorize a good artist and perhaps also a successful artist. By discussing how open calls, public or social art can lead an artist to potential speculating on the choice in the hunt for commissions, exhibitions or recognition.

By the inspiration of Sergio Leone’s movie “The good, the bad and the ugly” from 1966, and with the help of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel philosophy about the *Unknown Known*, the overall aim of this text is to reflect on three groups or categories of artists: Good, Bad and Ugly or populist artist as someone being in-between good and bad. Based on the choices, political value and opportunities a visual artist is having, the essay lead to the open question of what direction or form art has today

Key words:

#MeToo	Leone, Sergio
Art	Polarization
Artist	Political correctness
Bad	Politics
Black Life Matters	Post 9/11
Call-out culture	Postcolonial
Cancel culture	Refugees
Censorship	Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, The
Climate	Self-censorship
Cowboy	Social constructivism
Good	Stable
Gun	Trauma
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich	Ugly
Heteropathic identification	Unknown known
Left-wing	Wild West, The

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Introduction

What living and working conditions is visual artist having, and who is considered to be a good visual artist? With the meaning of *good* the intention is not to discuss the hypothetical question regarding the quality or definition of good art, instead, it is to point out the choices, the values or the political stand, from a Danish point of view, that categorize a good artist and perhaps also a successful artist. Inspired by Sergio Leone's movie "The good, the bad and the ugly" from 1966, and with the help of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel philosophy about the *Unknown Known*, the aim of this text is to reflect on the categories that exist within art in today society by dividing the artists into three groups: Good, Bad and Ugly or populist artist as someone being in-between good and bad.

The essay will include surveys and debates of the life and working conditions, and complexities of censorship and self-censorship that existed for visual artist in 2000s and in the 2010s, to understand the reason of the choices the artist makes and perhaps which direction or form art has today. Furthermore, I want to discuss how open calls, public or social art can lead an artist to potential speculative choices in the hunt for commissions, exhibitions or recognition.

Using Sergio Leone's movie as a tool

At first reading drawing a parallel between artist and classic western movie seems naturally very abstract and one could say wrong. However, I do believe that especially Sergio Leone's movie "The good, the bad and the ugly" from 1966, can work to some extent as a tool to understand the characteristics in art today. The reason to include the iconic movie is due to the very clear definition of the main characters in the fictive genre of western movies, which actions or roles can help in an abstract format to understand the choices made by visual artist today. However, using the comparison to the fictive universe of the wild west is perhaps not that alien as thought. First the individual aspect of the lonely cowboy and, in most cases, the lonely or individual visual artist career seems as an unavoidable comparison. Moreover, the camera has got the metaphor as a gun, which shoots or takes a snapshot of subjects or objects. (S. Sontag, 1973). The last strange although funny comparison is the expression or term used when an artist is signed with a gallery: To be in stable with a gallery, referring to the horse stable. A simple search on google shows that several galleries are using the word *stable* in connection with their name. To mention a few examples: the iconic Stable Gallery in New York, where Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg had exhibitions (closed in 1970), Stable Gallery in Damariscotta in the state of Maine, The Art Stable in Amsterdam and Stable of Artists, which is seen as a popup gallery in Copenhagen area.

To briefly describe Sergio Leone's 'The good, the bad and the ugly' we follow three characters (bandits) that meet at several occasions in the movie in a hunt for money and especially a treasure of great value. Parallel to their meetings the whole society is hugely affected by the ongoing American civil war

(1861 to 1865), which plays a big role in the choices made throughout the movie.

As a comment it should be mentioned that the original title of the movie '*Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*' is directly translated as *The Good, The Ugly, The Bad*, placing the *ugly* as being a character in between the *Good* and the *Bad*, which is also the intention of this text. Especially interesting element in the movie is that Leone gives the voice to the person in the middle, *The Ugly*, and thereby forces the viewer to reflect on a world that is not only black and white. This element is of course also a point that one should have in mind when reading this text. Also, that each individual is having its own history, experiences and possibly even trauma, which could be one of the reasons to feel the need of creating art, to inform the surroundings about a current state of mind or feelings of the artist towards others.

The voice of the trauma

By introducing the theory of trauma in art, the intention is not only to put light on one of the strongest feelings, able to evoke and provoke empathy and solidarity. Moreover, it can also be seen as a conscious or unconscious intention of the artist to show an atmosphere, a fear, a political stand or motive to wish for changes or to put awareness on the *unknown*, which also will be touched in next chapters.

While the work of the artist may help to underline subjects, themes or issues, it should be emphasized that art in itself is not able to create any political changes, make revolutions or change radical behaviour. After all, Art is a dead object,

nevertheless it can give life to things which could be on the way to be forgotten or on topics one wishes to have focus on.

In recent years issues related to post 9/11 global politics, climate, refugees and postcolonial traumas have made a mark on the contemporary Art world. Perhaps most evident seen in the thematic, which get into and out of fashion particularly in the domain of international art biennials. As a recent example the following events can be mentioned - the 2019 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (GIBCA) where the theme was: *“exploring entangled histories such as the relationship between colonialism, industry and environmental destruction, and the interplay between human and non-human ways of looking at the world.”* relating to the Swedish slave trading history.¹ Another example is The 16th Istanbul Biennial in 2019 which focused on the impact of human activities upon the planet, including the themes of human waste, climate and issues of mass tourism.²

In the book *Empathic Vision* (J. Bennett, 2005), Jill Bennett describes art as *“a kind of visual language of trauma and of the experiences of conflict and loss”* (J. Bennett, 2005 : 2). Bennett points out that if you identify any art as “about” trauma and conflict it potentially opens up new reading, which rarely is in intention itself by the artist, who construes the operation of the work as exceeding any single signifying function.

Bennet continues *“Trauma itself is classically defined as beyond the scope of language and representation; hence, an imagery of trauma might not readily conform to the logic of representation”*.

¹ <http://www.gibca.se/index.php/en/archive/2019/framework>

² <https://bienal.iksv.org/en/16th-istanbul-biennial/the-seventh-continent>

In general, one could divide trauma related artworks into two groups: Artists who experienced the trauma on their own body or saw the trauma happening and Artists who take the risk of identifying with the other, which the American art historian Kaja Silverman defines as heteropathic identification. Meaning an artist or person who shares either empathy or political interest for or against a subject, however, has not experienced the trauma in person.

To give examples of artists who work in the two groups, the following can be mentioned:

The project *My Bed* (1998) by **Tracey Emin** (b. 1963) from United Kingdom was created in the light of a personal depressive phase in the artist's life when she had lived in her own bed for four days without eating or drinking anything but alcohol. The Vietnamese-Danish artist **Danh Võ** (b. 1975) addresses the issues of identity and belonging in his family background, by focusing on single event which is connected to his family life and escape from Vietnam. **Larissa Sansour** (b. 1973) Palestinian and Danish Artist working with identity and political issues surrounding the living conditions of Palestinians in Palestine. The Korean-Danish artist **Jane Jin Kaisen** (b. 1980), whose work surrounds her adopted past from South Korea, memory and migration. The Greenlandic artist **Anne-Birthe Hove** (1951–2012) used her practise to graphically portray alcohol abuse and misery, bleak housing blocks, family life in front of the TV.

Artists who work with the trauma of others:

Car Crash Studies from 2009 by the Danish artist **Nicolai Howalt** (b. 1970) is a photographic study of cars that have been involved in severe and fatal accidents. Danish-Trinidadian artist, **Jeannette Ehlers** (b. 1973), who in her work often addresses themes and questions about Denmark's

colonial history. **John Kørner** (b. 1967), who works with such problems in the Danish society as prostitution or loss of Danish soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. And **Tina Enghoff** (b. 1957), who has been working with loneliness in her work *Possible Relatives* from 2003.

Comparing with a photojournalistic or photodocumentary point of view, photographers who work with crises, war or conflicts, take different roles depending on how close they were to the actual event. If they were there when the traumatic event happened, or if they documented the indexicality trace after the event, which of course can be a traumatic experience itself. Here the amount of time between the traumatic event and when the photographer makes the documentation has much to say.

In the journalistic world, being the one who brings the first story or takes the first picture brings royalties and money to the media house or photographer if he works as a freelancer. The very fact that visual artist is also working as a freelancer and with a lifestyle surrounding an uncertain and unbalanced income, is something that has become very evident during the Covid19 aid and compensation given by the government in Denmark in 2020 and 2021. It has been a big surprise for many politicians, even the minister of culture Joy Mogensen (Social Democrats)³, and is seen by many as a parallel way of living, compared with the rest of the society.

³ <https://www.bkf.dk/aabent-brev-til-kulturminister-joy-mogensen-juni-2020/>

The economic living conditions for the Visual artists.

In November 2018 Copenhagen Business School, CBS, published a survey⁴ about the economic work and living conditions for visual artists in Denmark. The purpose of the study was to give light on Danish visual artists income and economic working and living conditions.

According to the survey there are a total of 3,028 visual artists in Denmark, who match the selection criteria of being a visual artist. The selected criteria are:

- Members of the Association of Visual Artists (BKF)
- Members of the Society of the Artists' (Kunstnersamfundet) at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.
- Recipients of the Statens Kunstfonds grants from 2006-2016
- Graduates from the three art academies in Denmark: The Royal Danish Art Academy (Fine Art Schools), the Jutland Academy of Fine Arts and the Funen Art Academy, or from a similar art academy or institution abroad.

The demographic of the visual artists in Denmark concludes that the average age is 54 years, 57 % are women, 58% live in the Capital Region where also the biggest amount of the youngest artists is living. 24% have completed a bachelor's degree, BFA and 34% a master's degree, MFA in visual arts. In comparison, 10 % of all Danes have a long higher education (master's degree or more) and 15 % of all Danes have a medium-terms higher education (bachelor's degree).

⁴ Billedkunstens økonomiske rum - Danske billedkunstneres økonomiske arbejds- og levevilkår

The Organization:

- 21 % is a member of the Society of Artists' (Kunstnersamfundet), which is achieved by application and selected by a jury.
- 62 % is a member of the Visual Artists' Association (Billedkunstners Forbund, BKF)
- 7 % is a member of UKK – the Association for Young Artists and Art Mediators.
- 10 % is a member of the Union for Visual Artists (Danske Billedkunstneres Fagforening)
- 36% is a member of an unemployment insurance fund.

The average income is DKK 242.000, which is roughly 30% less than the average salary of all Danes which is DKK 350.000. Artists who are receiving early retirement pension, state pension or similar are not calculated, since their income situation is different from artists on the job market.

The main picture shows that 17% of all artists are having a yearly income connected to their profession of DKK 100.000 or less, and about 50% with an income of DKK 200.000 or less before tax.

The income is very unequally distributed among the visual artists. There is great variation in the average income understood in the sense that quite a few artists earn quite a lot, but the vast majority of the artists earn quite a bit on their artworks. The few artists who earn a lot pull up the average significantly.

The survey shows that there is no significant difference in the average income of the art educated and non-art-educated visual artists who are meeting the criteria for this survey. However, it shows that members of Kunstnersamfundet with or without an art-education, have bigger income than other artists and receive grants easier. (Bille, T., Alacovska, A.,

Baldin, A., Horndrup, S. N., & Mikuta, R. H., 2018 : 113 and 135)

The conclusion of the survey is a picture of that 91.6 % of visual artists in Denmark are not able to live of their art alone and thereby need to have an additional income, and often several different types of income. Along with this the survey also shows how economically dependent the majority of all visual artists is on their partners economic situation and the average of income for artist is kept up by 9.4 % in the whole industry (Bille, T., Alacovska, A., Baldin, A., Horndrup, S. N., & Mikuta, R. H., 2018 : 13).

One thing is the economic situation, which is a way to outline the life of a visual artist, another is the political or moral stand that is seen and also to some extent controlled in the artworld.

Polarization in Art

In 2019 a research team at the University of Copenhagen and the University of Aarhus made a survey named "Affective Polarization in Denmark: A List Experiment on Social Distance to Political Opponents". The aim of the research is seen in the light of recent American studies⁵ concluding that currently (2018) American politics demonstrate a high degree of "affective polarization" - i.e. an inclination for citizens to express negative feelings towards citizens of other political observances, in particular supporters of other parties. The Danish survey concluded that every fourth Dane would dislike having a person of opposite

⁵ The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~seanjwestwood/papers/ARPS.pdf>

political observation as a neighbour. (Hjorth, F., Sønderskov, K. M., & Dinesen, P. T., 2019 : 209).

In an interview⁶ (accessed 4 January 2020) to DR (Danmarks Radio, 2019) Peter Thisted Dinesen one of the authors behind the article and professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Copenhagen also concluded that there was a tendency to prefer a neighbour who votes in the same political spectrum as the participants of the survey, most significantly within the left-wing voters who do not want to live next to political opponents.

Along with the survey University of Copenhagen developed another study (2019) called “Political Partisan Prejudice: A Survey Experiment of Affective Polarization among Danish Partisans”. The result of the survey proved the greater chance of, for instance, getting a scholarship if the candidate shared the same political values as the jury member, chair of the board representing an institution, corporation or foundation. ‘In the experiment, respondents were asked to choose one of the two candidates for a scholarship, where one of the candidates had a partisan affiliation. The results show that respondents felt less sympathy for the partisan candidates and consequently awarded them with the scholarship less often. However, the discriminatory preference is amplified, when the partisan candidate is from an opposing party’ (Hansen, T. F., Birk, L. K., 2019 : 209). This is again according to Dinesen happening most significantly within the left-wing. An award-, scholarship- or grant-philanthropist has thereby in most situations greater chance of giving out support if they have a common political interest or agenda with the applicant, that is seen in the benefit of the present society, institution,

⁶ <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/hvem-vil-du-have-som-nabo-ikke-en-politisk-modstander-siger-roede-vaelgere>

corporation or foundation. Michael Thouber, Director of Kunsthal Charlottenborg, addresses this censorship in art in a radio debate with the topic of Freedom of expression in art (Danmarks Radio, 2019 : Time 32.24.00), by saying that curating IS a censorship.

A growing Callout culture and Cancel culture

Social medias such as Twitter, Reddit and Facebook have been a key factor in the increasing political polarization globally⁷. One example is the Arabic Spring in 2010 where social medias played an important role in sharing opinions and information. ‘The new media brought critical news and opinion to a broad public, gave voice to the voiceless, built ties between activists and ordinary citizens, and linked local protests into a powerful master narrative of regional uprising’ (*Lynch. M., 2015 : 90*). Today the result of the debates on social medias have led to the online phenomenon of Call-out culture and cancel culture, that both are related to online shaming.

Call-out culture which is not only related to political disagreements was especially accelerated by #MeToo in 2017 where you saw a collective moment towards individuals (direct and indirect) who were exposed or *called-out* by the use of social medias. The term of Cancel culture is seen in several examples even before the creation of the internet, however as mentioned earlier it has been increased with the use of social media. The term is defined as social media activism, boycott or public shaming of a person or persons who shared a

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https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/is_social_media_driving_political_polarization

questionable/unpopular opinion. It also affects those whose past behaviour was unethical, illegal and wrong, which often turns out to be fatal for future career and personal life. The two terms of call-out culture and cancel culture are often seen in combination because of the increasing social activities spent online. An example is often seen in the Swedish society where especially questioning the immigration problems leading to public shaming online and offline expressing political disagreement.

Even though the two terminologies are still rather new in our understanding, it feels they existed in the artworld for many years. The next examples show how cancel culture and polarization are perhaps more evident in the artworld where left-wing artists are clearly stating a problematic relation to right-wing art or politics.

Examples of cancel culture and polarization in the art-world

A very early example is when the Danish artist group Eks-Skolen was invited to do an exhibition (Tabernakel) at Louisiana museum of modern art in Denmark in 1969. The exhibition was cancelled by the artist group before the opening because of an official censorship of the artwork *Hesteofringen* by the Danish artist Bjørn Nørgaard. The happening of sacrifice and dissection of a horse in a comment to the ongoing Vietnam war, was prohibited before the exhibition started by the Ministry of Justice and the Chief of Police in Helsingør. Explaining that it is prohibited to display alive animals at the museum Louisiana refused to provide space for the dissection of the horse. As a reaction the collective decided to cancel the exhibition, which should have been the most prestigious so far by the artist group. Later Bjørn Nørgaard became known as a big breakthrough and an established artist, while the artwork

stands today as important artwork/*art happening* in Danish art history.

In the last 6 years the following events can be mentioned: the Biennale of Sydney, 2014 where five artists (Olafur Eliasson as one of them) decided to withdraw their participation due to the Biennale biggest and co-founding sponsor the Australian company Transfield which is contracted to the Federal Government to help managing the mandatory detention/ asylum centres on Manus and Nauru islands. This was made “to send a message to the Australian Government that we do not accept their unethical policy against asylum seekers.”⁸ (accessed 7 January 2020)

Another example was back in 2016 where Ai Weiwei artist decided to withdraw his installation *Yu Yi*, 2015, from the exhibition *A New Dynasty*⁹ (accessed 5 January 2020) at ARoS Art Museum in Aarhus Denmark as a direct consequence of Denmark’s policies on asylum seekers same year.

The 2019 Whitney Museum Biennial¹⁰ (accessed 7 January 2020) where several artists wished to withdraw their art from the Biennial because of the vice chairman of the Whitney's board, Warren B. Kanders, and his ownership of military supply companies that among other things sell tear gas and bullets.

⁸ <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/entertainment/arts/five-artists-withdraw-from-biennale-of-sydney-in-protest-over-board-refusing-to-cut-ties-with-manus-is-contractor-transfield/news-story/6cebde997fe6ae75e2ae7ff93cd2203c>

⁹ <https://en.aros.dk/about-aros/press/2016/ai-weiwei-withdraws-installation/>

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/21/743993348/at-whitney-museum-biennial-8-artists-withdraw-in-protest-of-link-to-tear-gas-sal?t=1578488127007>

The Danish art gallery Læsø Kunsthall experienced in 2019 a big critique and direct threats the days up to and during an exhibition called Den Politiske Kunst¹¹ (accessed 3 January 2020) English translated; “The Political Art”, arranged in connection with the post Danish 2019 general election. The debate began when a group of artists and curator cancelled their exhibition and cooperation with Læsø Kunsthall that was planned for the autumn same year. The group protested with an ultimatum to take two artists who previously have been convicted of racism, 'hate speech' and violence, off the coming exhibition. This did not happen and even though the show was not in any connection with politics both curator and artists decided to boycott their coming exhibition at Læsø Kunsthall. Where could the idea of a need of moral police come from?

The Academy in the beginning of the 21st Century

The political correctness and academic education of the Artist has been discussed in various periods throughout the last 50 years. As an early example the counterculture of the 1960s (in Danish Ungdomsoprøret) can be mentioned, where students at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts occupied the Ministry of Culture showing their protest towards norms and the establishment, demanding new professors and new structures in the school. However especially since the beginning of #MeToo in 2017, the structure of the art-institutions is very debated not only in connection to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen today, it is seen across art

¹¹ https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/politiske-kunstnere-bliver-haengende?publisherId=3929013&releaseId=13576950&fbclid=IwAR3JDbI-JT3UsBW9Y3fM2RhPp5acR11Cm_XH4Nw6bZjPnTTPX1wDaDJcRkE

institutions all over Scandinavia¹² (10 January 2021, accessed 17 January 2021).

In Copenhagen the question, the discussion and focus really got new heights when a group of teachers and artists connected to the academy, shared their opinion of the Fine Arts program. The debate was raised by the journalist at Weekendavisen, Poul Pilgaard Johnsen (8 April 2020), lead by anonymous teachers, alumnus and students from the school, argued that academy have lost its will to discuss art, but is more interested in teaching social constructivism and political correctness. According to the article¹³ (accessed 3 January 2021) many of the teachers who have shared their opinion have decided to be anonymous in fear of the consequences and being called-outed by students.

Articles¹⁴ (1 February 2010, accessed 3 January 2021) from other parts of the Copenhagen University are following the pattern of an increasement of political correctness in the programs. In the debates professors and experts expressed their concerns that, the tendency of censorship could be harmful to important research and studies. The rector's chairman, Jens Oddershed expressed in the same article:

“Protect the freedom of research and remember to make room for the politically incorrect researchers”

¹² <https://khrono.no/forst-gikk-n-reaktor-sa-gikk-enda-en--det-stormer-pa-nordiske-kunsthogskoler/543217>

¹³ <https://www.weekendavisen.dk/2020-15/kultur/kunstigt-akademi>

¹⁴ <https://www.information.dk/indland/2010/01/reaktorformand-giv-plads-politisk-ukorrekt-forskning>

One of the voices in the art world, who decided to stand out was Tal-R, Tal S. Rosenzweig (born 1967), who also has been working as a professor (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf) and was alumnus of the academy in Copenhagen;

“The majority of the students in there are not interested in art, but to sit in plenum and discuss why there are not enough elevators for the disabled (red. in the school), while they sit and tick off the list of the current ideologies of abuse and fight with each other about who feels most traumatized”. “Of course, it is good that the unfairness, abuse of power and sexual harassment of the past have been addressed. But things go wrong when the fear of personal violation move in as an agenda in the artistic process. (...) these new agendas are really healthy for society, but they are dangerous at an art academy.”

Henrik Plenge Jakobsen, current professor (alumni of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, professor at art academies in Stockholm, Oslo and USA):

“At the academy in Copenhagen, it was surprisingly difficult, and from a number of students I received criticism that I talked too much about art. Many had other agendas that always came before the art and the conversation around it, such as identity issues or school politics.”” Sometimes it has almost been as if there was a kind of ‘police’ among the students who was constantly watching to see if anyone was crossing borders of any kind, whether it was about gender, power, identity or race.”

Sufie Elmgreen, assistant critique class teacher for first- and second-year students and also class representative in the admission committee, talked about the acceptance in the school:

“One is afraid to say anything at all. Instead, the art of the new students quickly becomes something harmless. Something about

having read about a topic on Wikipedia and creating a product on that topic because it interests one very much.”. And in the connection with being in the admission committee; “.. you clearly feel the identity politics, because the majority of the group wants applicants who have the same view as they themselves.”

The debate not only pointed at the left-wing values that are dominating at the school, it also focused on the dilemma of the freedom of expression in the art scene, when it comes to the importance of being able to work with politics not representing left-wing values.

One concern is that the free individual artist could be “guided” too much by contemporary thoughts so there is no room for the Unknown Knowns, which is referring to the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), who described art thinking as dealing with all the obscure and unspoken knowledge that people make into knowledge.

Compared to his view on Historians who are shortly explained as one who should rescue, from the past, those ideas that are most needed, to compensate for the blind spots of the present (*Hegel. G., W., F., 2001*). The difference between these two definitions is; that in art, which always has a purpose according to Hegel, artist works with the good, helpful and important thoughts we already think we know. Historians work with historic evidence and the known, also described as the Known Knowns, the things we know, we know. (*Johnsen P., P., 2020*).

This is of course not the claim that art should not be allowed to deal with politics, it has been and is a natural part of the thinking of the Artists since the birth of Modernism:

“An artist is at the same time a political being. Constantly alert to world events, whether they are terrifying, fascinating or pleasurable. Paintings were not made to decorate apartments; it is both an offensive and defensive weapon” Pablo Picasso. (Picasso Museum Málaga, November 2019)

In November 2020 the debate accelerated when a group called Anonymous Visual Artists (Anonyme Billedkunstnere) made a political statement by throwing a bust of the founder of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (King Frederik the 5th) in the canal in Copenhagen, stating that it was an artistic *happening* and was made in connection with a course about postcolonialism. Only a few have admitted their action of the happening, one of them the teacher and the course responsible Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, the head of the Department of Art, Writing and Research at the Academy of Fine Arts, who was fired shortly after her confession and role connected to the happening.

As the article from Weekendavisen (8 April 2020) also addressed as a conclusion of the many anonymous voices is that the head of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Kirsten Langkilde and the previous head Langkild, Sanne Kofod Olsen, are the ones to blame for giving space to such a development of the academy. Kirsten Langkilde got fired on the 14th December 2020 by the Ministry of Culture, less than two years after she started, as the result of the episodes mentioned in the article and also because of the art happening in November 2020.

Discussion: A dilemma in art

The article written by the Danish artist and curator Thomas Altheimer (Atlas Magazine, 2016) questions the moral in art when looking at public or social art.

In Denmark, social neighbourhood improvement has been practiced for many years through massive investments. Altheimer claims that because the process in Denmark is decided top-down, meaning that public art is politically motivated progress including state officials and researchers that initiate the processes, the art which is made is in some way already decided before the artist is invited into the process. In the US and England for instance this is often controlled and funded by grassroots movements, which arguably result in a greater variation of art. Altheimer continues:

“No one can be against a neighbourhood improvement, but when art is systematically involved in raising the cultural capital of residential areas and thus contributes directly to accelerating gentrification, one forgets not only that it is not the task of art to be a moral actor, but also that qualified contemporary art excels by being critical and especially self-critical.”

The article focuses on the fact that lack of critical distance has created a culture where artists work on the basis of money from companies, state and municipality. While the whole idea is based on ethic mindset that says the projects are good because our intentions are good. In other words, the ethical morale condition for a piece of public art, is often raised higher than the aesthetical and critical value. *This* seems also to be a dilemma of art critics, that easily can end up in a situation

appearing to be against the moral intention of the artwork and perhaps also against the art critic own political value.

This moral dilemma is also seen in connection to what is shown in museums and other government funded art institutions. Here the number of visitors is first priority, mainly because of the ambitions stated in the statute for museums by being an important role in the society as an informative institution:

“.. because we work from a belief that art in the museum's rich collection has a role to play in the society around us, by virtue of its ability to deepen our insight into the course of the world and the understanding of other people and other times.” Mikkel Bøgh, Museums Director at the national gallery of Denmark, SMK.

Here, like in any other museum it is essential that the museum is able to appeal to a wide audience attracting more people and thereby also creating a greater income for the institution.

By bringing in the thoughts of Thomas Altheimer it feels that there is a greater political and personal acceptance and interest in good moral art, than the experiment of the opposed. By saying this, art and artists have in all times been dealing with provocative art or art that has questioned the society we are living in, however when looking at an average visual artist economy, money could be important factor to what an artist is working with, questioning the artist's own loyalty toward his or her own work.

Conclusion:

Of course, it should be mentioned that the nature of human beings is very complex, and it needs to be addressed that the aim of this essay is not to be a true copy or definition of the challenges visual artist is having in the beginning of the 21st century. The essay is a simple attempt to step out and study things a bit from a distance to reflect on the art industry seen from the artist perspective.

Even if it might seem so I am personally, funny enough, not a huge fan of classic western movies, mostly because the whole industry has been and still is criticised for being naive and to a big extent manipulating a romantic vision of what actually happened historically. By this I also want to emphasise that the movie industry and thereby also my analysis should not be confused with being a true mirror of what the historic wild west in the US looked like. It is important to distinguish the reality and the fiction.

With the knowledge I got from especially the surveys, articles and books connected to this essay I can conclude that the life of artists is very dependent on their own economic situation. This is of course not a new ground-breaking research and I know that each artist knows at least one in the network, which had to give up or pause the art career because of not succeeding in selling the art. However, what the research also shows is the importance of the fact that artists need to actively show that they are on the right side of the political spectrum. Even willing to jeopardise lockout or cancel exhibitions in favour of stating a political statement. For this case I see it as a critical behaviour among artist, where art risks to walk around in circles, if the idea of the free minded artist is locked to act, think and do things because others are dictating the moral and

ethical aspect. This is not only between artists, but also among philanthropist, museums and gallery directors, and art curators.

However, when this is mentioned, fashion in art comes to life and leaves again. I believe that this is an important and shaping milestone in art history, but as everything else in this world, things will change over time. However the role and need of money in the artist life will most likely continue to be an important factor for many years to come.

The Bad

Before defining a good Artist, I think it helps to start defining what a bad artist represents. If we go back to Hegel and look at his differences between an artist and a historian, history is mainly all about the knowledge or data we know, while art is describing something we don't know about what we know. With all respect to a historian, I think that more artists will define themselves as historians than historians defining themselves as artists. In this respect, artist working with the *Known Known* is most likely not fitting the criteria to be accepted to an art academy with Hegelian ideologies. With this in mind, if we take the definition of success as ability to make a living with your art, it is then not determined by the need of having academic education, it is more determined by the motivation or the determination to make art. So, if the value of the Bad is the opposite to the value of the Good, perhaps we will start to get an understanding of the situation when the Good ones are accepted to art academies and the Bad ones are not getting any grants based on their personal views. Of course, an artist makes choices based on his or her personal definition of what is right and wrong.

It is interesting that the Bad in the movie of Sergio Leone is strangely the one who kills less people. That could question how we perceive the definition of bad.

The Good

It is quite tempting to conclude that the Good artist is just the opposite to the Bad, however I think by the discussion of who is winning the open calls or being selected for public art, there must be added a new skill or layer to this definition. The question of how known is the unknown in *Unknown Known*, going back to Hegel. In my eyes the artist who manages to see the things before things are happening or knows how it is to be in the present (perhaps by experiencing trauma), must be per definition a genius. Perhaps the 9.4 % of artists, which is a number of those who can make a 100% living of their art in the whole art industry in Denmark, earned their success because they share the same ideologies or values as the key players of the art market. Perhaps the good artist is having the knowledge that others do not have. Like the *Good* played by Clint Eastwood in the Leone's movie, where the Good is knowing where the treasure is buried and tricks the two others.

The Ugly

This is perhaps the most controversial character to analyse. If you study the character in the movie, you experience a person who is more or less forced to make a living, no matter what it takes. Personally, I see myself very much in this character. If we define the Ugly as someone in between good and bad perhaps we describe the artist as the one who works with the *Unknown Knowns* but also the *Known Knowns*. The artist would most likely be accepted to the academy context because of the artist's current ideologies which are matching the admission committee's views. If you look at the characters, it is also the Ugly who talks most throughout the movie. The

Ugly artist hasn't experienced the trauma himself/herself but is working with other people's traumas. The economic situation is tight and thereby the Ugly uses the skill of *Known Knowns* by remaking the work of the Good to apply to exhibitions, grants, awards to get the financial support. According to Thomas Altheimer it is problematic to work with good things, in the sake of goodness and also to be dictated by others, how art should be. This is also referring to the social constructivism and political correctness mentioned in the article in Weekendavisen, Poul Pilgaard Johnsen (8 April 2020). So here one could perhaps argue if the Ugly artist is making good art by retelling the story that you already know?

Where is art going today ?

To once again draw a reference to Sergio Leone's 'The good, the bad and the ugly', the three characters are living with the ongoing American civil war as the reality sideways with their own life. In my eyes this parallel story could be seen as the ongoing conflicts and crises that we are experiencing today.

I think if you look on the movements in art, it is very evident that the left-wing ideologies will control the art that is being made today. In the light of #MeToo and Black Life Matters, Denmark is experiencing more political correctness and equal awareness, this would most likely also be reflected in the art world by the one who produces the art, but also the one who supports grants, awards and exhibitions. In the museums it will be seen as "playing safe" that will attract audience with the same ideologies as the art, which is being represented. This is perhaps leading to the idea of Übermensch¹⁵ *Overhuman* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), where one should have

¹⁵ Klausen, Søren Harnow: *overmenneske* i *Den Store Danske* på lex.dk. <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/overmenneske>

self-knowledge in relation to own actions, which you often hear in the debate in connection to political correctness today. If you reflect on Hegel's ideas and the foundation of the thoughts around art academies, it seems that the ideas are being challenged, especially by politics. Who knows how tomorrow will look, but if art should maintain the magic of the *Unknown Knowns*, which in my eyes have been helping to define and explore the world we are surrounded by, we should perhaps reflect on what art and art research mean to us as human beings and what value it gives us?

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