

Sara Borghero*

Bad Art

Abstract

This article explores the possibilities offered by Bad Art within the art system, which at times still appears as an elitist world that few understand and have access to. Starting from the article "Exhibit Bad Art" (Gompertz, 2012) we will interview Anna Choutova, head of the curatorial project "Bad Art", and link the thoughts of art critics and scholars who highlight the potential of Bad Art as a popular, ironic and accessible art form, showcased by institutions such as The Museum of Bad Art.

Keywords

Bad Art, Transgressive Art, High Culture vs. Low Culture, Art System, Bullshit Art, Tommaso Labranca, Anna Choutova, *Vraghinaroda*

Introduction

Gosh, that's awful! It would look great hanging in a museum.

Hirsch 1995

Who decides what is beautiful? What is art? What makes an artwork noteworthy? A long-standing perspective is that beauty and goodness are not prerogatives of art, and our culture has moved away from the idea that art must meet a specific set of standards to be defined as 'good' and worthy. However, it seems that the complete freedom of expression has yet to be achieved. All too often, the art system still seems to rely on "brand name" artists and works of art. Even after art freed itself from imposed canons, it remains an elitist system producing a series of transgressive and provoca-

* University of Bologna, Italy
Email: borghero.sara@gmail.com

tive works by avant-garde and post-avant-garde artists. While this system has created and requested provocation and transgression, some barriers persist between so-called high or low culture. It is precisely in low culture and Bad Art where we find authentic and irreverent artistic expressions of humor and transgression, which serve as reflections on our times.

The Bad Art Exhibit

I have a proposal. Why doesn't one of the world's major modern art museums—say MoMA, Tate or the Pompidou—mount an exhibition of bad contemporary art drawn from the institution's own collection?

Gompertz 2012

In an article for *The Wall Street Journal* titled “A Modest Proposal: Exhibit ‘Bad’ Modern Art” (2012), Will Gompertz, BBC's Art Editor and former Director of the Tate Media, challenged art museums by proposing to exhibit the lousy art works contained in their deposits. According to Gompertz, museums could create interesting exhibitions by displaying the seemingly less appealing artworks contained in their collections. He criticizes the fact that in many cases, only famous works of art are exhibited in museums without ever trying to provide space for different works.

The issue of museum collections is still widely debated:

UNESCO and ICCROM world surveys found out that over 80% of museum objects are stored in warehouses, 60% of which are inadequate in terms of conservation and safety and hardly accessible to the public (ICOM Italia 2019).

It is a well-known fact that only a minor part of museum collections is accessible to the public for various reasons, including conservation. After Gompertz's experience as director of one of the world's most important contemporary museums, he had the opportunity to see the number of artworks hidden away in storage rooms of the Tate Gallery in London. His idea is to have expert curators identify the worst artifacts and then put them on display, not to create an exhibition of “degenerate art” or invalidate artistic artifacts, but rather to make an exhibition that creates a debate about how aesthetic taste has changed over time.

The institution invites one of its brightest curatorial talents to rummage around in its collection of contemporary art and select works that he or she subjectively deems to be “bad” or not very good. [...] We would have some grounds for proper debate: for an

informed, contextualized, heated, passionate discussion about the art selected and contemporary art in general. It would highlight how tastes change and how some art works can lose their power remarkably quickly (Gompertz 2012).

As Gompertz rightly observes, the success of some now famous works of art was due to the foremost museums legitimizing them. For example, Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907) was initially criticized for the artist leaving it half-finished. The artwork found its reappraisal. It is now one of contemporary art's cornerstones, thanks to its acquisition and promotion by MoMA in the 1930s. Such an outcome is not always the case, but Gompertz observes that these possibilities are not considered by museums, which tend to show only extraordinary works, subject to the expectations and tastes of the art system.

About a decade later—while many works of art keep lying in museums' storage spaces—Bad Art is, however, enjoying more attention through thought-provoking museums and curatorial projects.

Bad Art by Anna Choutova

What separates the scribbblings of a 5-year-old child from a masterpiece by Cy Twombly or Jackson Pollock? In a world where a blank canvas can sell for \$15million, who decides whether artwork is genius or a disaster?

Bad Art exhibition, 2016

"Bad Art" is a curatorial project conceived in 2016 by Anna Choutova to challenge the contemporary art world through transgressive and unusual exhibitions that offer original ways of fruition. On the website, she presents the shows as "a reaction & protest against the hushed silence, white-walled gallery experience" (badartpresents.com).

The exhibitions of the "Bad Art" project seem, indeed, to defy the norms and practices of the art system, challenging that kind of art which, with the words of Tommaso Labranca, we can characterize as "never disturbing, never ambiguous, never the starting point of a path that will lead you to discover something else" (Labranca 2016, 40). It is contained within glossy white spaces—the infamous "White Cube" (O'Doherty 1986), in other words, the "white nightmare" (Labranca 2016, 76).

The exhibitions display particular and non-conformist artworks that fall within the Bad Painting movement's¹ canons and rail against all the fundamentals of the system, starting with the market. They are experiences that

¹ Further information: M. Tucker (1978), *Bad Painting*, Exhibition catalogue, New York.

usually last one or two days, and the artworks are not intended to be sold but rather to be interacted with and even destroyed. It is an expression of an ongoing battle for artistic liberation through irony and deprecation, attitudes that seem to be the paradigms of the contemporary world as a response to crises and uncertainties.



Fig. 1
Instagram feed of badartpresents



Fig. 2
Anna Choutova in her studio (2020)

Bad aesthetics are increasingly popular and find outlets in various social media platforms, which are fundamental for today's artists. In addition to the art exhibitions held about once a year, "Bad Art" is active daily on Instagram, presenting bad artworks through the account "badartpresents." Social media is a popular way for people to freely express themselves and gain notoriety without first having to be labeled by the judgments of critics.

Anna Choutova, born in Stockholm in 1993, is an artist and curator currently based in London. After graduating from the University of Brighton with a degree in Fine Art Painting, she began painting, drawing, and curating exhibitions consistently in 2015. Her artworks deal with contemporary society by looking at the imagery and language of 1960s Pop Art and updating them to reflect current thoughts, events, and popular culture.

While the past artworks reflected economic prosperity, the birth of mass society, and the novelty of consumerism, nowadays, we live for all intents and purposes in a mass society formed on a well-established capitalistic system. However, economic crises, uncertainty, and social struggle characterize the 'millennial' generation, which is often reflective and critical of life.

My work is the reflection and celebration of life's bad times. I confront intimate moments with a huge spotlight and show the world my insecurities, vulnerabilities and my 'nothing' moments. By tackling subjects like loneliness, lethargy and isolation in such a garish manner, a sense of humour is present in my practice—a kind of glorious self-deprecation that was heavily inspired by American pop-artists of the mid 20th century (Anna Choutova—Curated by GIRLS).

The following citations are taken from an interview I did with Anna last year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her valuable answers, which allow a topical reflection not only on Bad Art but—as we shall see below – on the art system and its contradictions.

The idea to create “Bad Art” was born after her art school graduation when she found herself in a state of frustration and alienation: the art world did not meet her expectations.

A.C.: It started off as a one-off protest night. I was twenty-one, I was ready for the weirdness, the eccentricity, and the excitement of the art world, and instead, I found a clinical, elitist, white-washed, all-male marketplace, where art was boiled down to a commodity and investment rather than... well, art! I remember going to private views and looking at beautiful pieces of work, created with so much soul and passion but existing in a 'white cube,' distanced from the viewers with alarms, ropes, and invigilators. I was bored! I felt like I was in a doctor's waiting room. In my eyes, artists and their art deserved more; they deserved to be celebrated and praised rather than just stuck on a white wall with a price tag.

These feelings led her to create a project to challenge the “elitist, 'clikey' and very white-male centric” world to which she has been exposed.

A.C.: I wanted to create space for artists who have been under-represented due to their race, religion, age, identity, education, and financial status. “Bad Art” preaches that anyone can make art no matter who you are. Beyond that, I also wanted to create art shows and experiences that were completely removed from the market. “Bad Art” has proudly never sold a piece of work because we want the public interaction with the art to be the entire experience.

The “Bad Art” exhibitions are not made to sell or contemplate passively but leave visitors with the indelible memory of a good, unique, and exciting experience with art. Something that cannot be bought, sold, or recreated. They can be considered as *happenings* in which the public is part of the artwork and becomes the actual protagonist.

When “Bad Art” first launched in 2016, critics and established art figures gave considerable criticism, seeing it as just a “hissy-fit thrown by a 21-year-old artist who had no idea about the reality of the art world.” Meanwhile, artists immediately wanted to be part of it, and the first show received over 400 applications. They all experienced that sense of alienation and frustration expressed by Anna, and they were seeking liberation. After working with over 200 artists, festivals, artist residencies, awarded grants, collaborations with countless organizations, and many “Bad Art” exhibitions, the skeptical art professionals started to become more and more interested.

A.C.: They can see that Bad Art is a global movement, that we are here to change the art world, and we’re succeeding! The art world is changing; artists are taking their future into their own hands and no longer relying on established institutions like Tate or Saatchi to guide them through; they’re doing it themselves—there’s a real DIY culture alive right now.

However, what makes Bad Art so good?

A.C.: Bad Art has a sense of humor. Humor is often looked at negatively; however, humor is the most powerful tool to connect a person with an artwork. If something can make you laugh, an instant bond is created that transgresses any language or cultural barrier. The art world and the art gallery normally demand a church-like anxiety and awe when coming in and looking at art. It’s ridiculous. Bad Art makes fun of the art world and itself. It’s self-aware. It is a moment to enjoy art, to laugh at art, to touch it, sometimes even destroy it. It provides a liberating space where you can enjoy art.

It can be observed that the aesthetics of Bad Art are increasingly popular, primarily through social media and alternative exhibition spaces, as people make an immediate connection with the humor and irony of the artworks.

A.C.: I feel like our society is becoming more and more self-aware, self-deprecating, and self-referential, which prompts a more ‘naive’ Bad Art style to exist. Creating art has also become quicker and become electronic. Our communication has entirely shifted from words to images. Just think about the leap from using Facebook to Instagram in the last few years. Emojis have become the fastest learned language in the history of civilization. This speed also contributes to the Bad Art aesthetic as it removes preciousness from making a work. There is an ever-growing reaction against the art history we have been taught (as it white-washed, all-male and euro-centric), and anger towards established art institutions and a general disdain for the formalities of the art world, so I feel a lot of artists are responding by being like “yeah I’m going to paint stick-men, with the cheapest paint I can find on some old cardboard, that counts.” Artists right now are re-writing what art is and what art can be. It is a very exciting moment.

Despite all its history of breaking the rules and canons, from the experience of Anna Choutova, we can say that the contemporary art world seems to remain a battleground between artists and the system, especially when transgression and astonishment become a weapon used by the system itself (as long as it can sell) but, overall, we are living in exciting times of renewal.

Is the art system full of bullshit?

Suppose we have to find an intellectual who has lashed out against the art system and the hypocrisy and cloyingness of prejudiced intellectuals and art critics. In that case, that person is undoubtedly Tommaso Labranca (1962–2016), an Italian intellectual, writer, television author, radio host, and publisher. He focused his studies on popular culture, analyzing it through an acute, personal, ironic, and unconventional descriptive style. He became famous for his analyses about Trash contained in the book *Andy Warhol era un coatto. Vivere e capire il Trash* (Andy Warhol was tacky. Living and understanding Trash, 1994) in which he defined Trash culture, redeeming it from misunderstandings. Trash is a similar category but quite different from Kitsch and Camp, and this adjective is too often used in the wrong ways. Being “progressive, autonomous and liberal” (Giunta 2020, 12) led him to a somewhat short-lived success, both because of the lack of a fertile ground for atypical writers and his unwillingness to make the necessary compromises required in authoritative and successful circles in Italy.

In his last book *Vraghinaroda* (Labranca, 2016), based on the author’s experiences in contemporary Milanese galleries, he harshly criticizes the art system and the people who make it an elitist, contradictory, somewhat hypocritical world. Among those personalities, he talks about artists, visitors, and art critics.

He criticizes the ambiguous “silly” sarcasm of artists who produce art in a presumptuous, superficial, and fashionable manner, taking advantage of the fact that everything can potentially become an artwork and, mainly, sell. Their attention-grabbing sarcasm, often used to make people talk, is ambiguous and made to be turned against the visitors who, if they dare to question it, will be blamed for not understanding the artist’s intentions.

Andy Warhol, who has a good quote for every occasion, used to say, “Art is anything you can get away with.” He seems to have stolen this phrase from McLuhan, but that is not interesting. What matters is the meaning, which is also ambiguous. Some translate ‘art is something you can get away with’. Others translate ‘art is anything that manages to sell itself to the fools as such’ (Ivi, 29).

Labranca then refers to a category of users who reduce art to beauty and sublime, sweetening any crude element from their experiences in favor of an “overpretty” that does not allow any form of low culture and whose only purpose is “to remove the ugliness of this world and help overcome the boredom of Sunday afternoons” (Ivi, 40).

In their delicate little hands, the uncouth Van Gogh became a delicate and sensitive Pre-Raphaelite painter, estranged from the world and painting little flowers so beautiful that they look as if they were made to decorate the walls of a nail shop. Flowers so multiplied on every support that they have erased the stench that plagued the hovels of the potato eaters. The overpretty is a perfumed world (Ivi, 38-39).

According to his overall analysis, the worst category is the art critics. They are referred to as “Vraghinaroda” [врагнaрoдa] (Ivi, 45), from which the book takes its title. The term is an adaptation of the Russian word врагнaрoдa (vragnaroda), which means “enemy of the people.” He criticizes the mediators who—instead of providing easy access to art—make it elitist, obscure for the masses, and try to give appealing meanings to everything, sometimes going beyond the artists’ opinion.

The enemy of the people is someone who works in the art world in a pretentious manner and without any fundamental knowledge or skills. They formulate superficial criticism using complicated concepts that conceal a lack of content. This superficiality is why he also calls them “Deleuzian mystifiers” (Ivi, 48-51), referring to the texts of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze to which these people sometimes rely on to give depth to their opinions.

врагнaрoдa, those who should choose invisibility, as is always required of those who mediate, and who instead place themselves on the highest rung of all scales. The врагнaрoдa is an obstacle, committed only to drawing a wall around his idea of art (Ivi, 46-47).

Labranca is undoubtedly not the only one criticizing the contemporary art world, the curator and art critic Francesco Bonami also spoke about the need to democratize art, especially when the museum audience is increasingly larger:

Nobody should go home after visiting an exhibition or a museum feeling like an idiot. The responsibility of museums and the people who run them and the artists who fill them has increased out of all proportion. Art can no longer speak to a small group of the faithful. Art must be able to be understood even by those who do not understand its language (Bonami 2017, 71).

With its irreverence, irony, ease of use, and understanding, Bad Art is a democratic and easily accessible art form. The relationship between bad art and the public is linear; we do not have the barriers of the sublime in front of us, nor the need to understand complicated and hidden concepts. There is no need to sew a story on it to sell it to the public. Bad Art is what it is, and there is no way to sweeten it because its charm lies in the failures and how it is made.

The Museum of Bad Art: Art Too Bad to be Ignored

Our intent is to celebrate these works. We're kind of celebrating the artists' right to fail, and we also are saving art that would be destroyed that we think is never going to meet definitions of fine art but is interesting, thought-provoking, sincere. It's got some of the attributes of traditional art. And we want to share and celebrate it.

Director Louise Reilly Sacco, interviewed by M. Wu, 2018

MOBA) is a community-based and non-profit museum which, since 1993, collects, exhibits, and preserves all forms of Bad Art, i.e., works of art that according to traditional aesthetic standards would never be part of a regular museum collection.



Fig. 3. Anonymus, *Lucy in the Field with Flowers*
24" × 30", oil on canvas, 1993
<http://museumofbadart.org/>

The idea to establish the museum arose when an antique dealer and collector, Scott Wilson, saw *Lucy in the Field with Flowers* between two rubbish cans in Boston (Fig. 3). The oil on canvas depicts an elderly woman in a field of flowers; the dissonant colors, imperfect shapes, and the 'wrong' details make it a perfect prototype of 'too bad to ignore' art, particularly in the confidence and conviction of the brushstrokes.

The pieces in our collection range from the work of talented artists that have gone awry to works of exuberant, although crude, execution by artists barely in control of the brush. What they all have in common is a special quality that sets them apart in one way or another from the merely incompetent (Stankowicz, Jackson 1996, V).

Wilson's vocation, seconded by Jerry Reilly and Marie Jackson, was confirmed by further discovering more artworks, which led to the final idea of collecting and creating an exhibition. Wilson was responsible for building up the collection—acquiring artifacts from yard sales, rubbish bins, street markets, and elsewhere, through donations or paying no more than six dollars per piece—while Reilly and Jackson ensured that it was available to the public.

The Museum of Bad Art had come into being, its mission commanded by the work itself. MOBA must bring the worst art to the widest of audiences (Stankowicz, Jackson 1996, V).

The first exhibition was held in 1994 as an experiment in the basement of a private house. Due to its success, the collection found a location at first in the basement of the Dedham Community Theatre in Dedham (MA). Later, it was located in the Somerville Theatre, which eventually became its only location until closing in 2019.

As previously stated, the world of the internet plays an increasingly important role for museums, especially when they want to capture the attention of a broad audience. This role, too, was sensed by the MOBA from early on, and back in 1995, they made the collection available on a CD-ROM, unique among the virtual exhibitions of the time (Stankowicz, Jackson 1996, 86).

Since 2000 the museum has been brilliantly managed by director Louise Reilly Sacco and curator-in-chief Michael Frank. At the moment, it is accessible virtually on the website <http://museumofbadart.org/> through Facebook, Instagram, YouTube videos, and their activity of talking with libraries and other organizations across the United States.



Fig. 4. Andrea Schmidt, *Mona Lisa*
Vancouver (CA), 12" × 16", oil on canvas, 2002
<http://museumofbadart.org/>

The museum's success, especially in the media, allowed the collection's expansion, which currently has more than six hundred pieces subdivided by themes. Often the categories make use of ironic puns best to convey the spirit of the museum and the collection; for example, portraits are transformed into 'Poor Traits.'

Talking about Bad Art being a democratic and easily accessible form of art, the public has played a fundamental role since the beginning, making it a community-based museum, strongly connected to its visitors, especially those who decide to become "Friends of MOBA" from all over the world.

The museum's intention is pursued with care and passion. The choices regarding new acquisitions and the management of its collection are characterized by a markedly ironic attitude, totally at odds with the traditional seriousness and demeanor displayed in usual museum environments. For example, the conservator Ethan Berry talked about the restoration of works of art as being very simple, opposed to the practices of traditional museums that require special care, especially in the case of the controversial patina issue:

Quite often, the paintings are covered with dust or other coatings. Years of cigarette smoke can really put a patina on a painting. I tend to use water as a solvent, and I scrub a lot with a toothbrush and the natural sponge (Ivi, 87).

Anyone can submit artworks for the museum's collection, but the curators, despite stereotypes, are highly meticulous and have exact parameters to enforce. The museum intends to truly celebrate the artists' right to fail: what matters is their sincerity and the fact that they are, after all, able to communicate something. It is not Bad Art for its own sake.

With an original and unconventional idea, the MOBA challenges the system and its taste rules by proposing the anti-art par excellence, which has always been produced over time by passionate amateurs and emulators and no one would ever think of exhibiting.

While it is painful to reflect on the countless pieces that have been destroyed in the thirty thousand years preceding the founding of MOBA, this pain seals our determination to find new and more creative ways to bring the worst of such works as remain on our planet to the widest audiences (Ivi, V).

Breaking down the prejudice on pop culture

Prejudice about "low" art is a limitation of art itself. Richard Keller Simon, in his book *Trash Culture: Popular Culture and the Great Tradition* (1999), analyzed trash culture, focusing on the literary, advertising, communication, and storytelling context, comparing the culture of the great tradition with contemporary pop culture to highlight how the stories that surround us every day are similar to the ancient classics, wrongly perceived as a distant reality characterized by an unreachable sublimity.

Many of the differences between trash culture and high culture show only that storytelling adapts to changing economic, social, and political conditions (Simon 1999, 2).

Many pop culture products considered trashy can be considered contemporary transpositions of great works of the tradition by analyzing their structure and themes. The suffering and decadence of the ancient nobility can be compared to the events and dramas of celebrities reported in gossip magazines such as the *National Enquirer*, where different forms, events similar to Euripides' tragedies are reported.

What really is the difference between trash culture and the great tradition? Why is *The National Enquirer* so bad and a tragedy by Euripides so good? For people with inquiring minds but short attention spans, our stories of suffering, fall, and recognition now come in short, easy-to-read fragments as a kind of fast-food tragedy-to-go, but the fragments themselves contain nearly all of the essential elements of dramatic tragedy (ibidem).

Despite the differences, there is a typical structure between the two products, and indeed, contemporary gossip due to its brevity, accessibility, and clarity have brought dramatic tragedy down to its most essential elements. However, people are inclined to approach tradition with care and respect, whereas the gossip magazine is considered pure entertainment and synonymous with little intellectual education. Simon does not intend to put everything on the same level, but he highlights the similarities between products generally perceived as opposites, showing how preconceptions lead us to have a distorted vision of history.

For example, studying Greek tragedy leads us to think that there was a higher culture in the past, whereas in reality, tragedies in 50 BC were, just like today, enjoyed by few (Keller Simon 1999, 5). With the same reasoning, the author relates the series of films *Rambo* (1982) to Homer's *Iliad*, noting that the former is a contemporary transposition of the latter. Instead of Troy, the war is set in Vietnam, and the hero Achilles is now a muscular Sylvester Stallone. Similarly, *Star Trek* (1966) has the same structure as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). The relationship between great tradition and contemporaneity is sometimes explicit, as in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), openly inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

By relating the great tradition to contemporary products considered trashy or mere entertainment, R. Keller Simon invites the reader to look at pop culture from a different perspective. Following this method, the author taught English literature at the California Polytechnic State University for many years, observing that students became significantly more engaged when the great tradition was compared to pop culture. They were more interested in studying the great classics and, at the same time, were stimulated to analyze contemporary products less superficially.

In conclusion, breaking down the prejudices and preconceptions on what is generally considered a bad cultural product leads to a whole series of exciting perspectives and points of view that can benefit both the art itself and the viewer.

Bad Art is no longer Shocking

In his irreverent yet precise and punctual book *Arte nel cesso* ("Art in the Toilet," 2017), Francesco Bonami, an art critic and curator, analyzes the relationship between museums and spectators and between good and bad art, providing an insight into what he believes the future of art should be. In his opinion, contemporary art has come to an end because it has begun to repeat itself.

The starting point of his thesis is Maurizio Cattelan's *America* (2017), also known as 'Golden Toilet', an artwork installed in New York's Guggenheim Museum that visitors can use as a toilet. Considering that many art critics see Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) as the beginning of contemporary art, Cattelan's artwork could be considered the ending point.

A century-long parabola in which contemporary art, starting from one loo, has reached another loo regardless of its economic value. [...] As if contemporary art and its ideas had been eaten by Duchamp's mouth, digested for a hundred years by the conceptual and other enzymes of his stomach, made up of many different artists, and then, like all food, once digested and assimilated, expelled from its natural outlet: Cattelan's ass (Bonami 2017, 8).

According to the critic, museum and gallery audiences are no longer surprised by anything, least of all by highly transgressive works. "People have become so accustomed to art that has to surprise at all costs that they are no longer surprised" (Ivi, 10). In short, it seems that fewer and fewer people are inclined to be indignant when they see a subcultural product, or outright rubbish, on display in a gallery.

On this subject, the considerations of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek are fascinating, in particular when he talks about the fact that the exhibition place and the art object are increasingly interdependent. In traditional art, the *void*—which was often a sublime or sacred place—had to be filled with an object with the dignity and elevation of that environment. In contemporary art, on the other hand, the place is no longer sacred or sublime, but the artifact supports the place, and in all likelihood, it does so not in a sublime manner. A phenomenon analyzed by Walter Benjamin with the concept of "aura" (Benjamin, 1935) related to the uniqueness of the work of art. Briefly: the advent of the cultural industry and cinema, connected to the new means to reproduce a work of art in any time and place, generates the loss of the aura. An artwork without aura, in order to impress, must provide shocking effects.

The gap between the 'sublime' and the 'trash,' also intended literally as waste and excrement, is increasingly thinner. Trash and bad products are often created specifically to fill the void of the exhibition space, also due to the growing phenomenon of the "culturalization of the market economy" (Žižek 2013, 316). In this phenomenon, culture is an essential component of commercial interests. The result is that the establishment now almost demands provocation, once done by artists to upset it. The system perceives an artwork capable of provoking indignation and shock with a certain satisfaction.

Today, and increasingly so, the cultural-economic apparatus itself, in order to be competitive on the market, must not only tolerate, but directly produce increasingly shocking effects and results. [...] In the postmodern, transgressive excess loses its shocking value and is fully integrated into the establishment's artistic market (Ivi, 321).

In his book *The Digital Plenitude: The Decline of Elite Culture and the Rise of New Media* (2019), the computer researcher Jay David Bolter highlights how two important events in the 20th century have determined some fundamental aspects of 21st-century culture: the expansion of digital media and the collapse of trust in "Culture with a capital C" (Bolter 2019, 203). Specifically, the traditional hierarchies of visual arts, literature, and music have come into crisis.

As a consequence, Bolter denotes, among many other things, an evident decline in the status of the humanities, in particular, history and philosophy. According to the author, it is now obsolete to say that, for example, classical music is better than rap music, but this does not mean that one genre has supplanted another, but simply that culture is no longer approached in a univocal manner. By extension, it could be argued that Bad Art can be considered one of many artistic styles without necessarily being considered lower or unworthy.

The division between elite art and popular culture has almost vanished. It is not because a single idea is being established but because people now have the opportunity to identify and define their core pillars and concepts of art. They can define art without imposing their conceptions onto others or being restricted by international canonizations, as was in the past. Bolter calls this multifaceted state of culture and art a "plenitude" (Ivi, 292) that finds its ideal environment in digital media.

Digital media has not been the cause of the decline of high culture, a decline which began well before the development of computers and the internet. Moreover, the success of digital media is directly linked to the fact that the digital is an ideal medium for this new state of culture.

"This multiplicity, this loss of the center, is not a 'problem' to be solved. It is simply the condition of our culture today" (Ivi, 215).

It should be noted that the reflections in his essay strictly relate to a certain American culture, especially the Mass Media one, wherein the changes described appear more evident. In Europe, however, Bolter denotes a more ambiguous situation, in which a distinction between high and popular culture continues to be applied, unlike in the United States, a place where traditional elitism seems to have, partly, lost its former stability.

We're always forced to defend our choice of consuming lower forms of art. The essential problem is that the dialectics and politics of trash assume an absolute characterization of trash; that is, many assume that consumers of trash consume only trash and nothing else. The perception that trash and high culture cannot coexist in a person's cultural palate is a predominant issue in trash culture politics (Lyons, 2013).

Conclusions

Starting from Will Gompertz's proposal of exhibiting Bad Art, we took the opportunity to talk about those who showcase and celebrate it, such as the curatorial project "Bad Art" by Anna Choutova, who underscored artists' difficulties, especially those who are unprivileged. Due to its sincerity and irony, Bad Art does not allow any sweetening or inventions and has a horizontal relationship with the public. Indeed, works of art are only legitimized by financial profit. Choutova's project seeks to break down these barriers in legitimacy and notoriety. On the basis of her criticism, we provocatively asked "Is the art system full of bullshit?" and through the opinions of the Italian intellectual Tommaso Labranca, we have highlighted the most questionable aspects of the art system to underline how Bad Art can be interesting to unhinge the hypocrisies of artists, users and, above all, art critics.

Analyzing the Museum Of Bad Art, which celebrates the right of artists to fail, we have, however, pointed out that Bad Art must be sincere, thought-provoking, and not merely bad for the sake of it. Through the contribution of R. Keller Simon, we highlighted some reasons to be interested in Bad Art and low artistic artifacts, particularly to counter the preconceptions in which the art system, and culture in general, are based.

To conclude, the reflections of Slavoj Žižek, Francesco Bonami, and J.D. Bolter gave a brief perspective on the future by pointing out that, right now, Bad Art is not only not disconcerting anymore, but the barriers between high and low are dissolving, and it could be soon considered one of many art forms, very likely to be exhibited. Actually, if we take into consideration the so-called "meme culture," Bad Art is already everywhere in social media and online platforms.

Art is an expression of the world and society in which we live, and perhaps Bad Art, in all its irony, imperfection, and provocation, is the best representation of a world full of bullshit.

Bibliography

1. Bad Art Presents website, [online] <http://www.badartpresents.com> [accessed: 15.06.2021]
2. Bolter Jay David (2019), *The Digital Plenitude. The Decline of Elite Culture and the Rise of New Media*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): MIT Press.
3. Bonami Francesco (2017), *L'arte nel cesso*, Milano: Edizioni Mondadori.
4. Donley Richard (2004), *Everything Has Its Price: The Indispensable Price Guide for Anyone Who Ever Wondered, "How Much Does that Cost?"*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
5. Giunta Claudio (1999), *Le alternative non esistono. Vita e opere di Tommaso Labranca*, Bologna: il Mulino.
6. Gompertz William (2012), "A Modest Proposal: Exhibit 'Bad' Modern Art", *The Wall Street Journal*, [online] <https://on.wsj.com/34RFafb> [accessed: 15.06.2021].
7. Hirsch Jack (July 12, 1995), "Gosh, That's Awful! It Would Look Great Hanging in a Museum—Painting Failures Are Displayed on Some Walls in Boston Dedication to 'Bad Art'", *The Wall Street Journal*.
8. ICOM Italia (March 16, 2019), "Deposits of museums for the cultural heritage", [online] <http://www.icom-italia.org/depositi-museali> [accessed: 15.06.2021].
9. Keller Simon Richard (1999), *Trash Culture: Popular Culture and The Great Tradition*, University of California Press.
10. Labranca Tommaso (2016), *Vraghinaroda. Viaggio allucinante fra creatori, mediatori e fruitori d'arte*, VentiZeroNovanta.
11. Lyons Siobhan (2013), "Trash of the Titans: An Introduction to Trash Culture", Macquarie University, [online] <https://bit.ly/3IIHb2J> [accessed: 15.06.2021].
12. Stankowicz Tom and Jackson Marie (1996), *The Museum of Bad Art: Art too bad to be ignored*, Boston: MOBA Publication.
13. Tucker Marcia (1978), *Bad Painting*, New York: Exhibition catalogue.
14. Wu Marissa (March 2, 2018), "The Museum of Bad Art", *The Buzz*, [online] <https://bit.ly/31BeQ7l> [accessed: 15.06.2021].
15. Zizek Slavoj (2013), *Il Trash Sublime*, ebook version, Milano: Mimesis Edizioni.

