

The Lights of Thomas Kinkade

It was almost dusk when I walked the streets of downtown Coeur d'Alene. Frost crusted the window panes, and the nearby lake was completely frozen over. Everyone on the street bundled in thick coats and scarfs and remained inside the shops most of the day.

Then my eye caught the flicker of a lovely fire inside an art gallery. There was an art exhibition taking place. Inside, I saw bright paintings hanging on the walls. There was also a man standing in a corner answering questions for people. I recognized him as Thomas Kinkade. I walked over to him.

Me: You are Thomas Kinkade?

Kinkade: Yes, I am. How are you doing today Miss?

Me: It is quite cold outside, but I am pulling through. You seem to be quite a talented artist.

Kinkade: Thank you miss. I love creating art that appeals to all folk. (Gotthardt, 2018).

Me: I see you are selling the artwork hanging on the walls.

Kinkade: Yes I am. This cottage here is a print which I made from a painting I did. Someone can walk in and take the cottage home with them because of how affordable it is. (Gotthardt, 2018).

Me: I heard critics have gotten upset that you create prints of your art. They say that you are taking advantage of the free-market system to make money. (Gotthardt, 2018).

Kinkade: Ah yes, "the number one quote critics give me is, 'Thom, your work is irrelevant.' Now, that's a fascinating, fascinating comment." "My art is relevant because it's relevant to 10 million people." (Gotthardt, 2018).

Me: I guess the important thing is that it is relevant in a genuinely cultural sense.

Kinkade: That is basically it. It is possible that 1 and 20 Americans have one of my paintings hung in their homes. They speak louder than the critics (Gotthardt, 2018).

Me: Thinking about reproduction though, what thoughts do you have on artist appropriation? I have read some articles about it—how it borrows another artist’s work or idea. One author who I believe was Gersh-Nesic has said that it recontextualizes a piece of art to help comment on its ‘original meaning’ how do you feel about that. (Gersh-Nesic, 2019).

Kinkade: I am a traditional man. Whenever someone buys my work or uses my work, I put my signature on it or offer the license for the prints making them authentic. I don’t think art needs to be reproduced by anyone else. (Authenticity Education | Thomas Kinkade Studios, 2020).

Me: Critics do find arguments for appropriation. They say that artist can use appropriation to comment on how mass media has been influenced by certain pieces of art—Sherie Levine for instance commented in a similar manner using another’s photograph (Gersh-Nesic, 2019).

Thomas Kinkade: That comment makes me a bit curious. Maybe I don’t understand the argument completely, but I will be speaking from my own experience. Critics are making the argument that another artist can reproduce someone else’s work to offer a new perspective. Do the designers change or alter the original design or give credit to the original designer?

Me: It depends. I know of Shepard Fairey who doesn’t give credit to original work with only a few or no alterations (Mark Vallen, 2007).

Thomas Kinkade: So, a designer can still reproduce a piece of someone's work and the critics can still make a positive argument for it, but if I reproduce my own work which I sign and offer licensing for I am still hated by critics?

Me: So, what you're saying is that artistic appropriation is inconsistent with possible double standards?

Thomas Kinkade: You could say that.

Me: Well, one of my concerns is like you mentioned, the inconsistency of the standards of appropriation. Some significantly alter it, yet I am concerned with the "brazen, intentional copying" of artwork by people like you. Sometimes they even mimic the work without altering it." Sometimes, it is done to make money; and at that point, the argument that appropriation is to comment on someone's work becomes irrelevant because one doesn't care about the original artist or designer (Mark Vallen, 2007, p 1).

Thomas Kinkade: I suppose critics can make another argument saying that appropriation creates accessibility. I recreate my art so that it is accessible to practically everyone (Gotthardt, 2018).

Me: You offer licensing though for your work. Don't you? (Authenticity Education | Thomas Kinkade Studios, 2020).

Thomas Kinkade: Yes, and for good reasons. Many companies globally can "exceed 600 billion" in losses due to counterfeiting. (Authenticity Education | Thomas Kinkade Studios, 2020).

Me: And that is a lot of money. Knowing that, we have to look at appropriation in a broader sense. Is commenting on the influence of art or making it accessible whether you deliberately takes someone's work or not more or less significant than the financial stability of people who

genuinely put effort into being creative and original? Whether we like it or not and whether critics can accept it or not, art and designs are naturally connected to the free-market. Someone can easily look at art and believe he can do something similar; and you know as an artist or designer, he has to make money somehow. He may think that he's inspired to comment on the cultural aspect of the art but he can be overlooking the effort the original artist had to put in to be financially stable as well. That's why original artists should have the say in whether another artist can use the original design or not.

Thomas Kinkade: I wonder how many think the same way?

Me: Honestly, I don't know. We all have different opinions for something. But, having the conversation did help shape my opinion on the matter

Thomas Kinkade: Is there anything else you'd like to ask?

Me: I think I am good—Except for one thing.

Thomas Kinkade: What is it?

Me: How much are you selling the winter cottage?

Thomas Kinkade. Come with me and I will gladly show you.

Works Cited

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