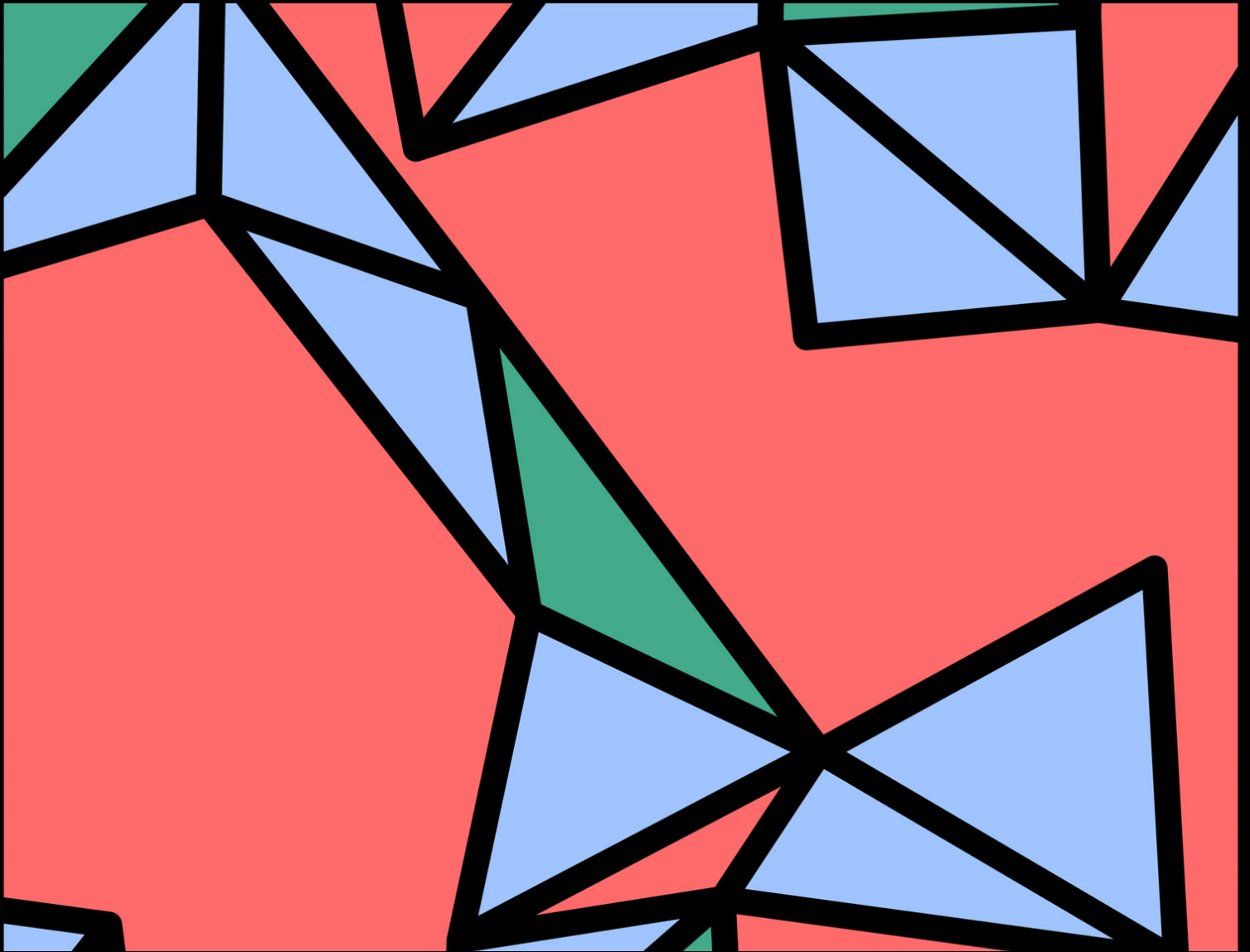




IT IS NOT ONLY THE WORK THAT GETS STANDARDISED

THE MISLABELLING

but the entire social staging of being an artist

TOBIAS POST

Artista · Arte luminosa digitale · Pittura · Progetti curatoriali

[CUBE4ARTS.DE/IT](https://cube4arts.de/it)

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This text does not attempt to define what art is.

It describes a social phenomenon.

Art has always been more than a picture. It has always also been a carrier of symbolic capital. Anyone who collected, supported or exhibited art signalled education, cultural belonging and social position. There is nothing new about that.

What is new is something else.

For the first time, it is no longer only works that are being reproduced. What is being reproduced are the social signs of being an artist themselves. That is precisely where the real mislabelling lies.

A creative market is emerging that produces not so much individual works as a standardised cultural role. Studio aesthetics, artist biography, social media, workshops, openings, limited editions, performative painterly gestures and a particular visual language together form a reproducible system of cultural belonging.

That is why it is not only pictures that resemble one another. Studios resemble one another. Artist biographies resemble one another. Working processes resemble one another. Workshops resemble one another. Collectors resemble one another. Even the language sounds alike.

The visual worlds, too, increasingly follow the same cultural codes. Large-format portraits of young faces. Big game in the logic of trophies. Colourful, expressive gesture. Echoes of action painting. Decorative contrasts of material. Striking squeegee marks. Spectacular surfaces. Seasonal colour worlds and ever new combinations of effects. None of these means is problematic in itself. Art history has always lived from appropriation, variation and reference. What becomes conspicuous is their simultaneity, their high rate of repetition and their concentration on a few instantly recognisable pictorial formulas. It is not individual stylistic devices that are being reproduced, but their social recognisability.

The more strongly individuality is asserted, the more clearly its standardisation emerges.

This is not a contradiction. It is the normal way social groups function. Fashion works like this. Architecture works like this. Luxury brands work like this.

Everywhere, shared signs emerge through which belonging becomes visible.

Individuality does not disappear in the process. It is expressed within a shared system of symbols.

It is precisely this logic that increasingly shapes this creative market too.

This shows not only in the pictures but equally in their social surroundings. Conspicuously often, the marketing is aimed at milieus in which social advancement is visibly staged: entrepreneurs, start-up founders, influencers, musicians, celebrities or other publicly visible milieus of success. Here, too, the same symbolism recurs – high-end cars, exclusive destinations, yachts, luxury property or other widely recognisable status symbols. The picture becomes part of this narrative. It confirms not so much an individual artistic position as belonging to a particular cultural lifestyle.

What is remarkable is that producer and buyer often use the same symbolic language. The artist stages themselves with attributes similar to those of their audience. Both share the same visual codes of social belonging. The work mediates between them. It becomes the visible sign of a shared cultural identity.

That is why lifestyle painting, social media, workshops and artificial intelligence mesh so seamlessly.

They follow the same structure.

In the workshop, what is organised is not primarily an open pictorial process. What is organised is a reproducible experience. Format, material, palette, tools and the essential steps are largely fixed. The likelihood of a convincing result is maximised, the uncertainty of individual decisions minimised. What is produced is not only a picture. What is produced is the experience of being, for a moment, part of this cultural role.

Artificial intelligence makes this development particularly visible. It does not reproduce art. It reproduces cultural codes. That is exactly why it works most convincingly where visual languages already consist of recognisable and combinable patterns. AI does not expose art. It makes visible how far parts of this market have already standardised their own symbolism.

With this, the function of the concept of art shifts as well. It no longer merely describes a cultural field. It becomes a seal of quality itself. Not for a particular work. But for authenticity, creativity, individuality and cultural status.

The real mislabelling therefore does not lie in whether individual pictures might or might not be art.

It lies in a standardised and reproducible cultural role being narrated and marketed as radically individual expression.

Historically, art has always also been a place of social distinction. What is new, however, is that this distinction has itself become a reproducible product. It is no longer the work that stands at the centre, but the social function it fulfils. As a result, standardisation becomes not a side effect but a precondition. For social advancement takes place through recognisable signs of shared belonging. Wherever belonging is meant to become visible, standardisation, recognisability and conformity arise.

The decisive question is therefore not:

Is this art?

The more interesting question is:

Is a work being developed here – or are the social signs of being an artist being reproduced?

That is where the real fault line runs. Not between art and design. But between an open cultural field and the industrial reproduction of its social symbolism.

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Post, Tobias (2026): The Mislabelling. <https://cube4arts.de/it/documenti/der-etikettenschwindel>

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