POSTRmagazine

Free

Counter-Culture Chronicle

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In honour of Timmy V.G. and Hunter S. Thompson

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#8

NOT SO F.A.Q.

HOW DID THIS GET ALL STICKY?
IF YOU CAN READ IT, WHO CARES WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE?
HOW DO YOU PROPERLY INSERT A PIG TAIL BUTT PLUG?
DO Y KNOW WTF YOU'RE D?
WHAT WOOD JANE DO?
AM I SUPPOSED TO USE ALL THE PARTS IN THE BOX?
DID YOU REALLY NEED THAT NEW PHONE?
DO YOU KNOW JACQUES FRESCO?
DO YOU HEIL HUGO?
CAN WE PUSH THIS EDITION TO THE OUTER LIMITS?
DID YOU BITE THE APPLE?
WHERE CAN I BUY WHO YOU ARE?
DID YOUR INTERIOR DESIGNER DRIVE A TRUCK THROUGH YOUR LIVING ROOM?
WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

Fully functional Lego AK-47. A DIY adaptation of Michail Kalasjnikov's classic assault rifle. Classic design truly is timeless.

EDITORIAL

INERTIA BY DESIGN

So we'll be discussing the pro's and con's of design this time around. I'll be honest with you, when this subject first came up during one of our meetings, my initial reaction reflected the skepticism of a journalist who feels he is being told to write a story about a matter unworthy of the ink and paper used to print the eventual result. Don't get me wrong, I can appreciate a designer steak knife or a 90 euro teapot as much as anyone else, I just felt that the editorial value of the story did not match up to the bigger subjects like the ones we're known for tackling. Indeed, the dandy designer does not stand tall when placed amongst a line-up next to the international gunrunner, the money laundering politician and child-molesting arch bishop. He is a luxury problem, a man pilfering only from the pockets of those who don't know what else to spend their hard-earned money on. Now this is a stab in the dark but given the trend in our evolutionary curve, design is only likely to become increasingly more important as more and more people gain the financial means to spend a percentage of their money on the aesthetic aspect of a functional object. Unless of course the revolution comes, in which case we'll all be back to carving spears out of modernist table legs. On the other hand, design might also be the field that holds the key to the creation of our future as it constantly raises our standard of living with every new idea that is conceived. In fact, when asked about who might be the ones to save us from premature extinction my thoughts go to designers like Jacques Fresco, visionaries who consider the design of something better as scientifically inevitable, a part of evolution, the next step towards living in the future. In that sense, design is the embodiment of our evolution as an intelligent species.

BAUHAUS

IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR STREET

Jonathan Ive is the Senior Vice President of Industrial Design at Apple Inc. He is the principal designer of the iMac, aluminum and titanium PowerBook G4, MacBook, unibody MacBook Pro, iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

In the classic sense, design is a craft. It implies the purposeful combining of two motives in the creation of a new object, a goal of binding functionality with aesthetics. Through its nature, art is excluded from design as it has no functional value except per se. The role of ideology has changed, especially on the bigger industrial plane where adding a little green label is a surefire way to boost sales. In design, there must always be a balance between function and form, even if one of them is emphasized. Way back in the olden days, design was often fueled by an ideology as well. Soviet constructivist architecture was not just meant to stand solid and look good, the buildings were also designed to reflect the principles of the communist ideal. Their idea of design did not exclude anyone based on their wealth or social standing. They created with the hope of changing the world they drew their designs for. More importantly, they made it clear that they believed in something beyond the price tag on their creations and even published their own magazines in which they propagated their ideals. Nowadays, you pick something that your target audience thinks is important (ecology is pretty much a sure shot these days) and then you incorporate that concept into your line of production and let the world know about your noble initiative. Does Apple minimize the amount of waste in the production of its computers and accessories because they think it is important or because the majority of people they design their products for are in the financial position to consider the environment in their purchase of a new computer or phone? Can clothing brands afford to sell inferior grade products with an average lifespan of three months because their customers would never even consider wearing the same clothes for two seasons?

GOOGLE THE VENUS PROJECT

Any good designer will define good design as innovative; it adds something to whatever came before, making it more functional, ergonomic, sustainable,...for the people who have to use it. They consider themselves responsible for the creation of a better future by designing it themselves, by extrapolating the constant growing and changing flow of knowledge, technology and aesthetics into a tangible object. Designers like Rem Koolhaas and Jacques Fresco do not want to see their designs standing in a museum so the simple-minded man can be amazed at their intricacy and brilliant idea, they want people to experience this brilliance first hand by using their objects in daily life without needing any credit for it. A designer who indulges in the creation of design objects only for the lucky few or for the praise of museums and blogspots worldwide is basically abusing his skills and knowledge for a career of intellectual masturbation. A good designer does not crave the recognition of his genius by an audience of art school alumni and curators, he will be satisfied with the praise he receives by proxy when he sees a two-year old who understands instinctively how to use the iPad he designed.

As history unfolds and the free market tightens its iron grip on the world, design only grows in importance. Ionic and Corinthian columns, the adorned Roman helmet (hardy har) and of course the subservience-inspiring cut on those Nazi-uniforms (Hugo Boss). Who knows what the French banlieues would have looked like right now if they had not been planted full of Le Corbusier's giant egalitarian shoeboxes? If you look at dilapidated housing projects and block buildings populated by the poorest people in our society you start to wonder how anyone ever thought that this sort of housing project could possibly be a good idea. Human individuals living in modular units like hens in a battery. Le Corbusier was inspired by the communist ideal; he modeled his housing communities after the Russian Narkomfin building, a piece of constructivist architecture squeezed in between the US embassy buildings in Moscow, currently rotting away at the bottom of Unesco's endangered buildings list. The Narkomfin building was designed to herald a new age in socialist housing: it had communal kitchens and washing areas in order to increase social interaction and liberate women from their traditional roles (feminists, calm your mares and lower your banners, this building was designed in the 1920's when taking women out of the kitchen was considered very progressive and the words domestic abuse' referred to a poorly cooked beet stew deserving of a severe beating or whipping). Sadly, the execution of these politically inspired architectural ideas was as shoddy as the actual execution of the communist ideal itself. Hence its epic failure and consecutive buttrape by Ronald McDonald and Mickey Mouse, whose moral principles are now the driving forces behind most of everything around you. A designer will create and develop ideas according to the environment they find themselves and their fellow people in. However, a designer who operates in an environment where sales and consumption are the primary laws of nature will automatically be confronted with the reality of competition, production cost, marketing strategies, trends and all these other factors that really have no longer anything to do with being innovative and designing the next step. So, design becomes diluted as it no longer serves its original purpose of taking us into the future; the emphasis shifts from improving and innovating to creating something that will be bought in order to be thrown away. These are the laws of the free market.

There are no morals in a marketplace.

In the society as we know it, whatever you design has to do the job and look pretty to yourself or the people you're trying to sell it to. In the majority of design, there is no longer any ideology and if there is one then the designers themselves most likely won't tell you about it. Why? Because those who design the majority of the products we buy (speaking on a mass industrial level) are themselves cogs in the machine. Western companies play according to the rules of the free market; rules that translate to making as much money as possible. The simple fact is that you don't make money by selling people a pair of shoes that last a lifetime, you want them to come back in six months when your winter edition hits the shelves. You want them to buy again, and you want them to be eager to buy, which is why you advertise for it; so people feel that there is something better out there for them to enjoy. Part of the beauty about the inferior product is that you can keep on selling it for as long as nobody figures out (or cares – look at your sneakers and go 'oh, right') that you're ripping them off and charging over 300% of an item's production cost at the cash register. There are no morals in a marketplace. Louis Vuitton handbags used to be tailor-made, handcrafted down to the very last seams and buttons, which to some degree may actually justify the price tags on them. But in 2010, these bags come rolling off the conveyor belt like any old pair of limited Air Max 90's Special Edition and the vast majority of the retail price goes to nothing except the two letters in the logo. You pay primarily for the image and what that does for your personality as perceived by yourself and/or others, while the functionality and craftsmanship that went into making it takes a backseat. Of course there are designers like Mike Thompson whose algae lamp is not only brilliant in its design but also makes a clear statement about its relationship to context and environment. Too bad he's a rare diamond and you can't actually buy any of his stuff.

YOU HAVE 0 FRIENDS

The designer has went from being the developer of the future to a 360° tailor for our personality. We define ourselves by the accessories we pick out of clothing stores, car showrooms and furniture catalogues. Most of us compose a personality by putting together a mix of things that other people thought up, chosen from different styles and the various permutations within those styles. Although that makes it sound slightly condescending, it rings true on a large scale. Design adds identity to functionality, whether we're discussing clothing, tools, musical instruments or architecture. From the paint job on your new car to the little label in the back of a t-shirt, every little detail is there to say something about you. Going off on a tangent: what is it about the concept of limited edition that fascinates us? Do we need to own an object that nobody else has in order to feel special? Nobody wants to go out and walk into a club to see some asshat at the bar wearing the exact same thing and deflating your carefully constructed mirage of identity.

Now this is where it gets interesting on a socio-psychological level. In the Western world, the individual is the center of everything; your life is yours and yours only and none of us are the same, just like no two flowers or drops of rain are the same. You are a unique ray of light. Unfortunately, that's not what it feels like in the real world. When you're young, it's relatively easy: you wear what your parents put on you and you play with whatever you feel like and that's it. Then you start going to school and meeting other kids and they're not wearing the same clothes as you. You start noticing that there is such a thing as cool and uncool, and you realize that you do not want to be dumped in with the other kids in the latter category. The ones who don't know what's hip and wear clothes that were dumped on them by parents who've never even heard of Hello Kitty or don't want to spend their money on the official licensed product and bring home a mercilessly ridiculed B-version instead, condemning their offspring to the cruel and honest scorn of the prehipsters in grade school. The ones who have nothing but lame toys so nobody wants to go play with them and their hopelessly outdated Pokemons on a rainy Wednesday afternoon. The ones who end up grudgingly hanging out with each other and form friendships out of a sort of hobo's solidarity that is based more on mutual exclusion from society than on anything else. Of course it only gets worse from there on out and some people will actually spend the rest of their life trying to define themselves by means of collecting a set of material items that they hope nobody else has.

GO WITH THE STATUS QUO

Nowadays, design is a large part of our personal life in the sense that the designer items you purchase represent the material aspect of your personality. How you dress, what you drive and how you live (architecturally speaking) are all related to how you perceive yourself and how you want to be perceived by others. Basically, it's image. We define ourselves by constantly cross-referencing, compiling an image of ourselves out of what we can find in the world. Now we don't want to step on any toes here, but that may be the time to start asking ourselves some questions. Not one of us is immune to the charm of design (unless you have a really, really strong personal opinion on what the world should look like or if you're completely blind to its features). But it's starting to look like we're getting it confused. We're living in a world where the expiration date of an object is no longer defined by when it gets broken but by when it goes out of style. I need a new phone, not because it'll work better than the one I have now but because I'm sick of looking at this scuffed outer body. I need a Toyota Prius because my neighbor bought the new BMW and I want to show him how much of a non-materialistic, environmentalist prick I am. The red on this t-shirt has gone from burgundy to scarlet so I'm going out to get a new one. It's a culture of excess where throwing something away immediately yields a reward of getting to buy something new. This is in sharp contrast with the designer's principle of stripping everything that is superfluous and creating a product that is superior to the one that came before. We have thousands of kilometers of clothing racks and product showrooms filled with stuff we don't need and never will. We live in the capitalist system where the free market prevails and the laws of this market dictate that the best product will automatically surface through consumer experience, rendering other products obsolete and forcing designers and production companies to step up their game and come up with something better. But our free market isn't really that free; throughout history it has spawned a number of mechanisms that directly influence a consumer's perception and ideas. The entire advertisement industry is a handicap to the free market as it is full of quasi-factual talk that revolves more around image than anything else. Import taxes artificially raise the price on foreign products that might be better designed in order to protect a domestic industry. The evolution of the standards that we hold the objects in our world up to is not in tune with the evolution of the world itself. The free market stands in its own way and therefore it stands between us and the future, as it is the dominant standard with no viable contenders to take its place. Car companies won't stop building cars that run on fossil fuels until they are faced with the reality of depleted resources. It's not that they can't design a better car (they already have) but they're also not going to spend a fortune on creating a whole new production line and infrastructure when the existing one is still working. Making a better world and making money don't mix.

Good design is the key that can allow us to take control of our own evolution. It is a discipline with a complete approach that can unite the progress we make on the different levels in our society: technological, social, aesthetical and economical. It has the potential to supercede religion, politics and military power because of how natural, logical and inevitable it is; nobody needs to be convinced of its value because the benefits are undeniable. Good design is measurable because the language it speaks in is not subject to interpretation. Great design does not need to be measured because its superiority asserts itself simply by being used. What needs to happen is the elimination of everything that is ill-designed and clouds our judgment. What we need is a standard of quality that rises with every step ahead. What we don't need is more megalomaniacal architects who need to build colossal towers as testaments to their genius or another generation of interior decorators who consider themselves artists because they made a chair you can't sit in.

YDIY?

KEEP YOUR HANDS ON CREATIVE CONTROL THE MANY FACETS OF DIY

The Toykyo cone sculptures designed by Bue being painted one by one by Benjamin.

The elementary idea behind 'Do-it-Yourself' involves quite a lot, from every fully equipped family man who singlehandedly tries to fuck up his own domestic property to the carrying mother sewing Scooby-Doo badges on her little boy's torn pants. But in recent decades, western society has more and more evolved into a breeding ground for the Do-it-Yourself-mentality wherein people become more and more able to shape their own environment from A to Z. Ever since its addition to common language, the term DIY has become closely connected to a wide maze of subcultures, design and art movements, if not assigned to a variety of obscure techniques, low-brow skills or time consuming procedures. Doing everything yourself has never been more relevant, omnipresent and fashionable as today, especially considering recent economical crises, the growing debate on durable societies and of course our ever increasing individualism.

The whole DIY philosophy is linked with design: it became popular in the 1950's with home improvement projects that involved the renovation of affordable, rundown older houses. Earlier accounts date back further, starting in the late 19th and early 20th century, when the Arts and Crafts movement –an international design movement that originated in England– reacted against the impoverished state of the decorative arts and the conditions under which they were produced. DIY culture and ethics often originate as a reaction to industrialization and serial production. Some ascribe the origin of DIY to the UK punk scene in the late 1960's and early 1970's with the creation of a recognizable (graphic) design aesthetic that used cut-and-paste letter forms, collages of photocopied images and hand-scrawled or typewritten typography. Regardless of how the concept originated, DIY is a natural way of expression that is still developing and continuing today. Obviously because of mankind's fascination in the countless processes that eventually lead to the spectrum of material objects that surround us. It is an interest that you either satisfy by walking onto a factory floor to stare at a computerized production line that produces 5000 salt shakers every minute, or by approaching life in a more creative way.

Some people just try to get creative with their environment without automatically making the assumption that they're the pinnacle of human creativity.

But what drives and inspires the people of today in their choice to create, modify or repair (parts of) their own objects without the aid of experts and professionals? And what does DIY mean to them? In order to find out, we decided to have talk with some diehard DIY artists and designers. "I'd say DIY is the application of something that is not considered very useful in a different manner in order to gain some kind of refreshing result", Dynooo answers, "Whether that result is art or design." Dynooo is a Belgian artist best known for his work as an unsigned electronic music producer, but he also runs his own record label, makes zines and collage art and customizes utilities. "I might pick up some spray cans and start spray-painting my furniture, or grab a jacket and paint a design on the back of it", he continues. "I do my own tattoos, make my own music and I have a VHS camera to create my own videos. People say that anything you do yourself, you do better. Me, I just like to do everything myself."

I LIKE TO MAKE CRAPPY THINGS

Although this approach and attitude fit the core idea of DIY, Dynooo feels no need to be identified with the whole movement. "I only found out about this DIY thing a couple of months ago and then I was already doing that stuff. It just comes natural", he says. "I believe that the poorer the environment and the less you have, the more you look for other solutions to get something done. Whereas some people can afford a 100 euro sweater, others go do some vintage shopping or pick it out of a garbage can and customize it. You make something out of nothing. Why would you buy a poster in a gift shop if you can grab an old picture, maximize it and make something out of that? Some people just try to get creative with their environment without automatically making the assumption that they're the pinnacle of human creativity. But that's exactly what DIY means to me. I just like to make crappy things."

In an essay we found in the book D.I.Y.: Design it Yourself (Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), editor Ellen Lupton's twin sister Julia refers to Karl Marx to explain the people's desire to actually own the things they produce themselves. DIY is not just a reaction against the dominant system of purchasing the items you want, it can also be a source of income and commercial success for its creator. According to Marika Giacinti –a French designer who grew up in the suburbs of Paris– one really should have a creative mind in order to start creating and designing everything him- or herself. She's the kind of handy girl that you would trust with your favorite childhood sweater for no other reason than to see it come back as an exclusive pillow which you'd cherish for the rest of your life. Which is exactly why she designs her own pillows right now. "Ever since I was very young I did everything myself", she remembers. "My sister and me designed our own games. We made drawings and wrote our own stories. Today I rather see it as giving a new life to existing objects with the freedom to create what you want and to decide what the object will be used for in its reformed shape. To me, DIY is using objects in your direct environment and reshaping them with simple techniques. It's spontaneous design with an instant result. You can create whatever you want and at least you get to see how your design makes progress. But I don't think that just anyone can come up with the idea of creating or customizing objects. You really have to figure out a concept in your head. Of course, you can find nearly everything in a store as well. You just have to open your purse and buy it instead of make it yourself."

I'M JUST KNITTING MY NAME

If you happen to come across a 1500 euro Todd James designer toy or a coffee table designed by Piet Parra, keep in mind that you're looking at an object that comprises hours of research and work through trial and error. Toykyo is a Belgian based design and production studio that collaborates with renowned and less renowned artists and brands. The small production team approaches the whole DIY phenomenon from a different angle. "DIY reminds me of that old stuff like the Arts and Crafts movement wherein architects would not only design the shape of a house but also the door handles, the silverware and the tablecloths. They thought about the total picture", Benjamin Van Oost (one of the studio's artists) says. "If we create an object or product for an artist, we like to think about the total picture too: both the technical aspects and procedures as well as the artistic part." By experimenting with a variety of materials and production techniques, Van Oost started transforming the illustrations and characters of his graffiti friends into 3D-shaped sculptures, utilities and toys. Starting off rather amateurish, today nearly every object that is produced by Toykyo is a high quality, highly limited edition object that is the result of days of work. "It's cool to make one beautiful toy or sculpture," says the graduated graphic designer/jack-of-all-trades. "But I can't describe how it feels to make a series of that same object. That's the part where you become somewhat of a one-man factory. It really feels great to make five toys in three days. Especially nowadays when everything is going so fast, it's nice to know that we can just take our time to create something from scratch in our own way."

So when done very properly, DIY design can change owners for a price tag as high as any other exclusive design object. Toykyo could take a design by Todd James to a mass manufacturer in China but instead they choose to go through the entire manufacturing process themselves. For most artists, the need to retain full creative control is stronger than the excessive pursuit of profit. "I love to work in my atelier in the middle of the night, scraping and cutting", Van Oost says. "It makes me feel like I live in the past doing something that comes close to Yeoman's work. During the production process, we come across small problems that need a proper solution. How are we going to construct this? What materials are we going to use for that? Today we create something in porcelain, next week we might use plastic or wood. We use different materials for the packaging. We learn a lot about a wide range of processes and we can use that knowledge and experience to accomplish future projects. I love to try these things out myself and eventually succeed, or fail. So this entire learning process is very interesting. DIY is learning while doing and the possibilities are unlimited."

Together with Marika –who's trying to find a producer to release her own pillow line– the people of Toykyo admit that they hope to release something that is produced on a larger scale in the near future. "I think everyone who's designing has this dream of making one classic object. And it would be great for us if you look at it from a financial point of view. DIY involves risks. If we work on five projects at the same time, we're constantly on the lookout for whatever can go wrong. So it would be nice to have some savings in the bank to invest in our little factory. You can keep on working on an object if you try to make it look like it was industrially fabricated until the point of flawless perfection, and in the end that's what we aim for. Still, if we would outsource everything and our design drops out of an injection malt somewhere in China, I wouldn't experience it as DIY anymore. If you look at our stuff with a keen eye, you will notice several imperfections. One of the charming things about DIY is that people know it's DIY."

WIN

ONE OF 5 NEW YORK CITY GARBAGE BOX BY JUSTIN GIGNAC

POSTRmagazine proudly adheres to the traditional press custom of handing out garbage to loyal readers. Only we don't insult our readers with shitty design like POSTR-sweatbands, key-chains or 12Mb USB-keys. We hand out actual garbage, scooped off the streets of New York by artist/art director/entrepreneur Justin Gignac! How do you get one these five pieces of cosmopolitan crap to sit crudely on your Eileen Gray coffee table?

Answer us this question:
What's the tagline that Justin uses for his New York City Garbage?

For more info visit www.worldofobjects.com

ME TARZAN, YOU CAME

STICK THAT DESIGN WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE

Matrioska vibrator designed by Rianna Swierstra

It's not unlikely that the first sex toy in history was a simple piece of smoothened wood, carved and polished by a lonely prehistoric woman. I can picture her now, sobbing in sadness but simultaneously carving away in eager anticipation of trying out her new lover: this landmark in prosthetic technology would replace a soulmate who was stomped by a rhino or brutally mauled by a pack of rabid wolves. Little did this lustful cavewoman know (or care) that her rudimentary design of this primal pseudo-penis marked the beginning of a new era; the dawn of a technological revolution that alone empowered more women than the feminist movement. Yes, the fake phallus has come a long, hard way. As of today, its pulsating shaft is strongly gripped by the pleasure-drunk hands of time, thrusting its way forward into the moist darkness of the future that lays spread out before it in twitching anticipation. Sometimes brutally and unrelenting, sometimes gentle and lovingly. Now when it comes to the design of sex toys, the male chauvinist pigs at POSTRmagazine are even more skeptical than they usually are. A decorticated piece of wood sounds efficient enough to us when it comes to accomplishing a female orgasm by means of anything short of a real phallus (see what we did there?). However, some penetrating research in the field taught us that in the excessive and superfluous world of design, sex toys might just be among the few objects whose existence is justified. That just leaves the question of whether or not these pinnacles of modern design are too aesthetically crafted to –literally– shove up your ass.

After unsuccessfully attempting to track down the designer of the eyebrow-raising 'Pig Tail' butt plug we were delighted to come across upon Rianne Smierstra, a sex accessory designer with workshops in Amsterdam (where else?) and Ghent. Naturally, we had to get to the bare bottom of this. In a way, she is doing the work that was started by our cavewoman thousands of years ago, which makes her an interesting subject on a historical and evolutionary level as well. Rianne does not only design sex toys, she's also the manager and chief of design of her own company Rianne S.

"Sex toys became my passion about ten years ago, when I saw my first vibrator. At first the designs kind of scared me, because back in those days they looked horrible – basically just crude plastic replications of male biology. The people who were designing these toys just took it for granted that a woman needed nothing more than a phallus-like object to get the job done. I knew those designs were not what women were waiting for, and I believed that there better ways of doing them. Back then I was already fascinated by design –I designed my first fun condoms at the age of fourteen– and I had a serious affinity towards sex in a healthy way. It captured my interest. So after a lot of detours –my degree is in landscape architecture so normally I design bigger things and I've worked in Italy for a furniture company– I started drawing my first vibrator about two years ago on a piece of paper."

"The market for sex toys had already been improved by a couple of good designers, but very often those were still men. Male sex toy designers make nice things, but I have my own female vision on those products and on what women expect from them. So I started designing. I'm the one who comes up with the ideas and designs. From there on out I work together with Valerio Sommella, a great Italian product developer who takes care of the ergonomics and details like buttons. When it comes to electronics we outsource it to an engineering bureau. There are two important sex toy expositions I participate in, one in Los Angeles and one in Berlin. Last October I went to Berlin with my products and it was a success. So next year I'm going to Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York, San Francisco and Tokyo to sell my products. I look at myself both as a designer and a business woman. Designing a successful sex toy is like designing any other object. First of all, you need to know the market, which basically means that you should have tried every product out there. You need testing teams and you need to find out what your customers consider fun. When I have an idea, I make some sketches and my product developer starts creating it. It's all about making a lot of prototypes and testing."

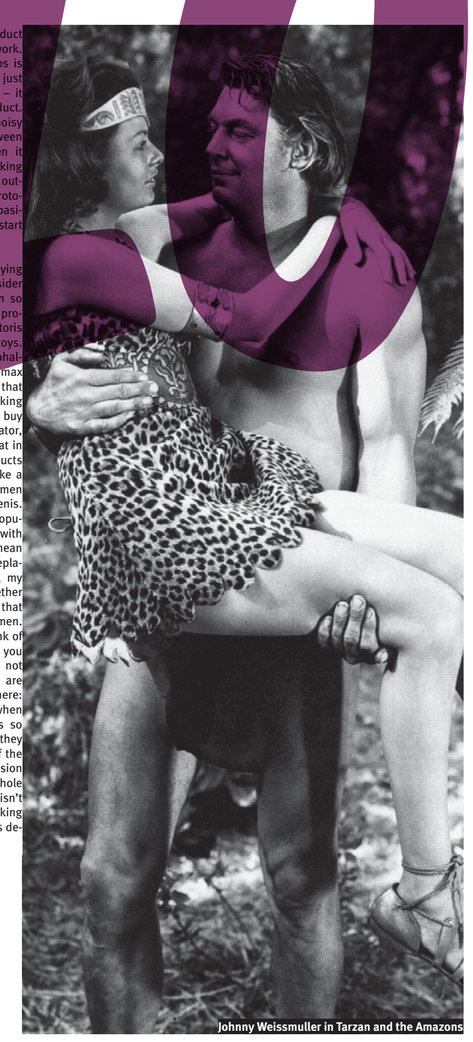
THE FAR FROM PHALLIC FORM OF FUNCTIONALITY

So far for the polished piece of wood. It's pretty obvious that POSTRmagazine has no idea what women want, which immediately explains why there is such a large market for sex toys. Apparently, there are a lot of women out there who don't get what they need from their bed partners and turn towards technology to get their proverbial rocks off. That's why you want your vibrator to be designed by a woman, since she's more likely to be aware of what you're looking for in your Tarzan. Having a man design a dildo is like having your Real-doll programmed with a fatty complex and endless conversations about other Real-dolls who think they're better than her. It doesn't make sense if it does not serve the purpose.

I've seen things so bizarre, I can't even explain how they were supposed to work.

"The first thing I think about when I design a sex toy is what I would need and what I consider funny. (at this point, Rianne shows us an apple-shaped massage tool with a little joystick that lets you choose different settings) When a couple is having sex and they want to do a little foreplay, it can be nice to have some kind of a massage ball that makes it a bit more interesting. So I came up with the idea of an apple, the forbidden fruit. Women have different orgasms and with this tool you can stimulate a woman in different ways. I'm somewhat of a feminist, you know. To me, Eve is a heroine, which you can see in the design. With this tool you stay in the sexual paradise. It's a combination between ergonomics and what I think men and women consider fun. I can appreciate aesthetics in every aspect of life and I don't think I'm the only one. So that's why I think of my job as a challenge to make something beautiful and aesthetic that turns you on at the same time. It has a lot to do with allowing yourself to have something beautiful. It's all about pampering yourself and I think that's what aesthetics do. Why should it be merely functional when sexuality is such a beautiful and diverse thing? Of course these toys need to be functional but if you put my tools on your nightstand, they're still nice to look at. You can have a great idea for a product but it won't go far if it doesn't work. Actually, one of the toughest jobs is finding the right motor. You can't just put a standardized motor into it – it needs to be adapted to your product. What velocity is the best? How noisy is it? So you need to balance between power, noise and velocity. When it comes to design, it's all about making models that are ergonomic. We outsource the production of those prototypes and then my testing team –basically my friends and myself– can start 'testing'."

"There's a big advantage to playing with your own toys first. I consider myself an average sexual woman so that means if I like it, others will probably like it too. Right now, the clitoris stimulators are the most popular toys. The first sex toys all looked like a phallus. But 80% of women don't climax by internal satisfaction alone so that means that a lot of women are looking for clitoral stimulation when they buy a sex toy. So if you design a vibrator, it's quite logical that you keep that in mind. I have designed three products so far and none of them looks like a phallus, simply because most women just don't orgasm with a plastic penis. So clitoral stimulators are very popular, especially the ones equipped with a little motor but that doesn't mean that I consider these tools as a replacement of physical love. In fact, my sex toys can easily be used together with your partner. Although I think that sex toys are a bit of a taboo for men. If I think of sex toys for men I think of cock rings and anal stuff. That's... you know, more extreme. So I guess not every man needs that. But there are definitely some weird things out there: I saw the most bizarre sex toys when I was in Tokyo. I've seen things so bizarre, I can't even explain how they were supposed to work. In one of the dirtiest sex shops I saw an infusion and even medical tools. That whole niche of extreme sex tools really isn't my cup of tea. You know, those fucking machines and all that. Yeah, that's definitely a bridge too far for me."



Johnny Weissmuller in Tarzan and the Amazons

THE EXPERTS

QUESTIONS:
1. Design is a very broad term. What is design to you personally?
2. What do you consider to be a golden era in design?
3. Are design schools or courses important?
4. In what direction do you think design will evolve? Will it become more important? What are the areas in which design can innovate?
5. In what direction will the designer market evolve according to you and what do you think about the increase in use of the term 'limited edition'?
6. More and more people are designing things themselves in the spirit of the DIY movement. Why do you think that is and do you think it can pose a threat for traditional/industrial design?

Lieven Daenens
Director of the Design Museum in Ghent.

In the definition we use at the museum, design includes every object with a more or less functional character. That is the big difference with art objects, which have an autonomous character and don't need to be functional. The only functional aspect a painter should keep in mind is to make sure that the paint sticks on his canvas. Design procedures are much more complicated. So aesthetics is just one of the many secondary aspects of design. We believe design isn't limited in time. So even though we do think a Gothic chest is design, we consider it a closed collection. We only exhibit 20th century and contemporary design.

The most widely used historical standard is that modern design started at the 1851 World Fair (aka the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations). It was held in Hyde Park, London and hosted a variety of industrially produced goods. It was the start of what I call an artificial battle between industrially manufactured products versus goods that are handcrafted. Design Museum Ghent doesn't disfavor either one: we consider both unique objects as well as serial products to be design. Another possible restriction we use refers to the period 1875-1880 as the beginning of design, when a designer's name was written on the object for the first time. The first designer to associate his name with a product was the Scottish designer Christopher Dresser. Before him, it was mainly the manufacturer who assigned his name to a product.
Until about ten years ago, our concept of design was a mainly western phenomenon. Nowadays we notice that other continents are producing very beautiful objects too: Japan, Taiwan and in less extent China. In those nations designers are working very hard and they have a high quality education. But the former Communist states of Eastern and Central Europe –previously not very renowned for their outstanding design– are also showing beautiful creations these days.

Very important. Of course there's a variety of educations, but designing objects involves extremely complicated procedures which you can't learn by yourself. You have to keep a lot of things in mind at the same time, different factors that require an individual approach. In addition, a designer needs to know what his producer or client wants.

Of course, design will become more and more important. People do care about good design and that evolution involves a lot of aspects. Traditionally people were mainly worried about the aesthetic aspect of design but nowadays durability is becoming more important due to environmental and economic factors.
People think it's difficult to fabricate refreshing and innovating design but everyday I discover new things that I consider brilliant. Innovation comes in many ways: aesthetics, technology or the usage of materials. Twenty years ago, nobody would have predicted that materials would become this important. Composite materials –which are a key factor in attaining durability– are extremely lightweight and almost unbreakable so they open up a whole range of new applications and possibilities. Without them we wouldn't have windmills as we know them now. The rise of composites is comparable to the rise of bakelite.

The phenomenon of limited edition most definitely is an evolution, yet I don't know whether or not it's a favorable evolution. I think it has a lot to do with searching for fast ways to earn money. The process of designing an object is very time-consuming: the timespan between the first drafts on a piece of paper and the actual release of the product is huge. Limited edition articles can often be produced in a shorter period because the difference in the production process. Sometimes limited edition articles can be made without any need for a costly mold so it requires less financial input. A designer who is making a limited edition article has more freedom when compared to a designer who is commissioned by a manufacturer. Besides, limited edition design can be instantly sold and it has a market of its own. Basically it's an aspect of art that is translated to design. An art lover buying a painting specifically wants that unique piece. The same goes for collectors of design. Of course it's not unthinkable that some people will take advantage of that feeling and get creative with the number of limited edition articles.

Obviously it has to do with the social trend of an increased individualism. People simply want to be or look different than others. You can buy a beautiful dress in a store, but mine is better because I made it myself. Luckily, I think this is more of an enrichment to design than it is a threat.

Studio Job
Design studio of Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel.

I guess we have a hate/love relationship with it. Most of the time 'design' is really hollow and meaningless but sometimes it can be very illustrative and remarkable.

Well that depends on how you look at it. Commercially, 'design' is 'exploited to the maximum by a massive industry. IKEA is basically the same as McDonalds: people buy a piece of furniture in the same way they buy a t-shirt or a pair of jeans. So yeah, the robber barons probably feel like they're living in the golden age right now! But it's also a known fact that mass consumption leads directly to illustrative poverty and a flattening of taste...which is of course not a good thing.

Well, they are the playgrounds for future designers, so yes, they're extremely important. Although I do think there should be as few art & design schools as possible.

Design is present everywhere, much like it's always been. Although the biological-ecological thing is definitely the new way to make an extra buck these days.

Everything has become 'limited edition' these days. I even saw some 'limited edition' mayonnaise in the supermarket the other day. But, like all other hypes, this one will pass as well. In the meanwhile, we're not going to stop making unique pieces and limited editions. When we put a unique piece into the world of design, we do it because we crave creative freedom. That craving is still there!

It's nothing new. Back in the days, people used to make everything themselves. It would be great if they actually posed a threat (market-wise) but so far it's too small and insignificant to really reckon with.

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