Interior Architecture

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Art & Design: What Is 'Design' & How Is It Different From 'Art'?

"Traditionally, a distinction has been made between the fine arts and the applied arts.

Fine art, such as sculpture, is meant to be looked at; the applied or functional arts, such as architecture, interior design, landscape design, and product design, are meant to be used."

"Shaping Space" Chapter 2, by Paul Zelanski.

In the broadest of terms it is reasonable to say that fundamentally
- **Design is about use while Art is about expression.**

There are many ways of both supporting this statement, and contradicting this statement, such as the fact that art can be, of course, useful, and work of design can be, of course, expressive.

Even so, the basic driving reason for undertaking design versus art lies with the difference between something being essentially useful rather than essentially expressive.

1. At the core of creating interior architecture is the activity known as designing.

Designing is a process. It is not a single action, or a single product. It is a set of related actions, resulting, usually, in a set of products, such as sketches, models, written instructions, and lists of required items.

Designing is a purposeful, systematic, and creative activity.

The process of designing things is purposeful: designers give form, color, texture, and scale, to products, interiors, and visual communications, and they address the functional, psychological, and aesthetic needs of users.

Designing is systematic: it involves the analysis of problems and situations in the built environment, and the transformation of findings into appropriate and useful proposals.

Design is also creative: designers must possess the knowledge, skill, and attitudes to create compelling visual and functional forms for spaces and components within them.

2. What is not design?

It is not possible to be exhaustive concerning   'what is not', but generally copying, mimicking, artificial, superficial, meaningless, generic, are some attributes of non-design.

What is design? Original, creative, meaningful, functional, elegant, context/site specific. Of course this too is not exhaustive.

3. Design is, for us, which is to say those who are seeking to be able to work as designing individuals, at a fundamental level, a matter of 'making'.

Making things: drawings, models, spaces, objects, et cetera.

Making may touch upon many different issues, such as use, material, cost, and location. Making may take place at a variety of scales and within many different categories of human need. Furniture, landscape, rooms, buildings, pens, shoes, and eyeglasses all can be the work of designing individuals, working alone, or in teams, in urban offices, or in rural workshops.

Making things is typically done in response to a need or a desire.

Designing at its most fundamental is sometimes described as 'thinking before acting'.

This is a pretty basic description of rational activity; thought before action. Design is a basic human activity. Peoples of all cultures all around the world design things, from utility items like tools, to paintings that have a primarily aesthetic function.

You can think of design as a sequence that address the way human beings live. Such a sequence can be described as:

Identifying Needs and Desires : Someone needs or wants something made, renovated, 'designed'.

Thinking conceptually, schematically, and finally, very precisely about making (constructing) something/some place.

Making it: Actually building, or constructing, or fabricating the 'designed' item.

Using the newly built, 'designed' space or item: Living in the house, working in the office, using the desk, or bottle opener.

Identifying New/Changed Needs and Desires: The user changes, the occupants have new needs or desires.

Revising and replacing: Starting the whole process over.

4.   Design is fundamentally about making things, but it is more than that. Design is a special kind of making.

It is a kind of making that is driven by ideas, and it is ideas that are engaged with the moment at hand, the present, the state of the world as it exists right now. The ideas that drive designers are typically about ways to make the world better, in large or small ways.

A better bottle opener, a better elevator, a better way to illuminate a room, or a better way to arrange furniture in an office are each topics of possible design exploration for a designer. Ideas that designers explore are about materials, forms, color combinations, technologies used in manufacturing, human needs and desire, the influence of climate, culture, and economics. These are just some of the topics that designers turn their attention toward.

The work of the very best designers is what we hold up as examples of what we strive for; innovation, subtlety, coherence, boldness, symbolic importance, and usefulness.

Design is about making, but simply making things does not mean that they are designed in any significant way. Design is driven by ideas.

Good design is about exploring ideas that lead to making things very well.

Good design is not necessarily expensive but western commercial culture has tried to make us think it is.

Good design does involve things that poor design, or low level thought, do not.

Good design often requires more time, because it takes time to do something well.

Good design often requires more initial cost, because good materials and tools are more expensive than poor quality ones.

Good design is a bit like good food; it costs more up front, but it will lead to a longer and better quality life.

5. Can, or should, designed things be 'pretty'?

Sometimes yes, and sometimes no.

'Pretty' is not the focus of design work, and it is not a goal: it is a possible result.

At its best, good design is more important than 'pretty'.

At its best good design is important, life altering, environmentally significant, and culturally influential.

Making things 'pretty' is a result, or an offshoot of design.

Well designed things may be pretty, but they are so because they are well designed, and it was that quality, of seeking good design, based on ideas, that drove the designing.

The 'Kleenex' tissue boxes that are called the 'designer' boxes are not designed; they are simply prettified through the use of floral imagery. The boxes come in several different floral motifs.

It is a bit like the concept of 'fun'. To set out to have fun often leads to unsatisfying results. On the other hand, to set out to do something interesting, challenging, or rewarding will result in 'having fun'.

Fun is a result, an offshoot, of doing things. Our western commercial culture has warped 'fun' into a goal of its own, rather than letting it be a pleasant outcome of other activities.

6. Making things look like, or have a 'theme', of something else is not designing.

Theme images are based on concepts and ideas of theater. Theater is entertainment, typically experienced for short time periods, for a particular desired effect. As in literature, a temporary suspension of disbelief is a central element in theater. Themed spaces seek to remove connections from the larger realities around them.

Can themed spaces be interesting? Certainly, but they are always facades, surfaces that are supported by something completely foreign underneath.

The best example of themed spaces that humans have devised is Disney World. Disney World requires millions and millions of dollars to prop up the facade world that you walk through. Sounds, smells, visual character have all been carefully molded to give the impression of being something that they are not. Literally under the streets of Disney World lies the maze of support systems that powers the facade you experience above. Disney World, even with the huge amount of money spent, rarely makes anyone over the age of 8 believe that what they are seeing is real, in the sense that it is what it is purporting to be. Cinderella's castle is, after all, not a real stone castle, the western town is just a movie set of facades, and the jungle is filled with stereo speakers and plastic rocks.

To propose to make a coffee shop in Athens, Ohio that 'looks like a Hawaiian village', is not designing, it is theater.

Does this mean that this never happens in practice? Of course not. All kinds of odd things happen in practice, but that does not mean that it is good design, or design at all for that matter.

7. Design is the exploration of ideas in relation to a need or desire in relation to physical and experiential characteristics and constraints.

Real designing is a contemporary activity; of and about issues, materials, functions, desires, that are contemporary, about today.

Designing a table quickly becomes an exploration of material character influenced by anthropometric issues, cost issues, production issues, and user needs and requirements.

8. Good design is driven by ideas.

The things that result certainly have image, style, or character, but these are the result of the exploration, not the cause of it.

To design 'a table for use in Hawaii' is a completely different charge than to design 'a Hawaiian table'. The latter makes us think about beach, sand, straw, flowers, and some kind of table that is made up of these culturally iconic elements. This sounds like something to be sold in a tacky tourist shop. The former makes us think about what it is that makes Hawaii distinctive; climate, native materials, and cultural interpretation. A table for use in Hawaii could be made of metal, wood, glass, plastic, or stone.   Why? Because designing a table for use in Hawaii is, first of all, about designing something in the year 2009, not 1850. Today there are plastics, metals, woods, and other materials and technologies available in Hawaii that did not exist there, or anywhere else, in 1850.

Our stereotypic image of Hawaii as a primitive, low tech, beach kind of place is naive, insultingly ignorant, and irresponsible.

Design is about exploring ideas and making things based on that exploration.

Design is a special kind of making, it is a kind of making that is driven by ideas that are engaged with the moment at hand, the present, the state of the world as it exists right now, using the technologies, methods, and materials of the current state of our world. The ideas that drive designers are typically about ways to make the world better, in some way, in large or small ways. The straw huts of Hawaii exist primarily as an image in a tourist brochure.

What is the difference between 'art' and 'design'?

Here are two good articles that I find helpful.

1. "Art and Design: What's the Big Difference?" by Michael Brady
©1998 Michael Brady. First published in Critique Magazine 1998.

From time to time, you hear people refer to art and to design interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. Or they use the term "art" to add a bit of glory to design work. Most of the time this happens in casual conversation, but it does tend to confuse the two terms unnecessarily because, basically, they aren't the same.

What is the difference between art and design? Are they closely related just because they use a lot of the same techniques and appeal to the same aesthetic sense? Or are they essentially different?

Well, art and design are different. The differences between art and design lie not so much in how they look as in what they do: They have different purposes, they are made differently, they are judged by different criteria, and they have different audiences.

Purpose

In a 1974 interview, Milton Glaser noted that whereas a design must convey a given body of information, the "essential function" of art is to "intensify one's perception of reality."

Sometimes, he said, these functions coincide, as in a medieval stained glass window, but in modern times they have diverged. Design is utilitarian in a way that art is not. Design is the how of a thing: how to order the parts, how to serve the client's interests, how to convey the information.

Art, on the other hand, is its own end. It isn't utilitarian. It subordinates ordinary usefulness to its own purposes. It doesn't concern itself with description the way illustration does, nor with the desires of the buyer as does fashion, nor the tastes of the public as does style

We have already accepted this model in both its parts--it's settled law. Since in the Renaissance, artists have aspired to the status of philosophers. And beginning the mid-1800's, many artists chose to stand apart from worldly life in order to critique it, to forsake the programs of patrons in order to set their own programs, to discard the public moral code to promote a different code. Although many artists claim to address their art to the world, their method has been to take from the world only on their terms and give back as they see fit.

This is definitely not the way of design, which considers the world's purpose first and fits the work to that end. How they are made If the ends of art and design are different, so too are the means of getting there.

Most of us think, correctly, of the artist standing before the blank canvas, pondering the beginning and the end of the painting all at once. The artist usually has an end in mind--something as mundane as a portrait or landscape, or as grand as the outrage of Picasso's Guernica or the vastness of Christo's Running Fence. But at the outset, all the options are available without precondition.

On the other hand, the designer typically begins with more than a blank canvas or lump of clay from which anything may emerge. Many of the components may already exist, such as the text, photographs, production formats, and even the basic colors. The designer consults the client on the end use, the audience, the size and scale, and other factors. The designer's role is to envision how these various aspects should come together in a tangible thing and to bring aesthetic sensibility, taste, and technical skills to bear on the production of the job. To put it bluntly, the designer arranges the ingredients.

Artists generally have assumed that the work is a product of their mind and spirit first, and only secondarily serves the intent of the commission (to edify, to stimulate, to delight, or simply to decorate). A notable example is the 1884 commission of a memorial sculpture,

The Burghers of Calais, for which Rodin made a striking group of six austere figures. But when the city fathers saw it, they rejected it: to them it was ugly, indecorous, unceremonial, and insulting to their notion of a heroic civic monument. Rodin had conceived it with his artistic genius, but they refused it out of hand because it appalled their sense of honor.

Making judgments

In 1820, Keats wrote, " 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'--that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Older still is the motto, "Ars longa, vita brevis." Art strives to achieve beauty, which is truth, which is a noble thing more enduring that life itself. At least, that's the party line. In this century art has emphasized moral purpose, visionary truthfulness, and inward-looking integrity.

Art is judged in terms of beauty and truth, of insight and revelation, of almost prophetic clairvoyance-when it isn't being judged as text, subtexts, and social constructs. Utility doesn't fit this mindset. Practical success is not the hallmark of art, as the example of Van Gogh attests.

Design is judged another way: "Beauty is as beauty does." If it doesn't get the job done, the design is considered not good, or worse, not successful. Does the design serve the product? Does it accomplish an end--does it sell, inform, persuade, direct, or entertain? Typically, lack of success in these ways (often described statistically or quantitatively) is considered a defect in the design. Ultimately, a design must fulfill its primary job of packaging or illustration or instruction, and no amount of aesthetic glamour will substitute for its failure to do so.

The Audience

The audiences for art and design expect different things. The audience for art wants to look at the artwork or listen to the composition--perhaps to contemplate and reflect, perhaps to be transported by the power of the aesthetic experience or the scene portrayed--whereas a design's audience wants to use the information to find their subway station or select a product.

Design may indeed arrest the attention and engage the emotions of a viewer, but at some point, as Beatrice Warde said, the goblet of design must become transparent, allowing viewers to gather the intended information, rather than to be absorbed by the designer's layout.

Art draws attention to itself deliberately. Its very form is the means to intensify our perception. If a visitor to the Sistine Chapel marvels at the economy of the scene of God separating the light from the dark, she is responding to the Michelangelo's conception, his artistic free creation. But if she is moved by the Last Judgment because of the profound theological truth it expresses, she is responding to the Pope's purpose. That is, she treats it as information design, as an illustration of doctrine.

Materials

Art and design differ significantly in their use materials. Typically, the ultimate work is not made from the same materials as those used during the design process (the paste-up or, these days, the on-screen stuff) but of its manufacturing materials. A book is not actually "made" until it is manufactured from paper, ink, and binding. Another kind of design product, the digital document, doesn't actually exist apart from its temporary manifestation on a computer, where its appearance varies from one browser or platform than on another, depending on the monitor, operating system, and color display tables.

By contrast, a work of art makes a point of reveling in its materials. Certain physical qualities are seen as critically significant, such as de Kooning's "painterliness," Pollock's drips, the encaustic of Johns's Three Flags, Murray's metal ribbons, or Schnabel's broken plates. Size itself is important in an artwork, whether it's a large Frankenthaler or Kiefer or a tiny Klee or Cornell, but in a way that differs from design. Perhaps it is better to distinguish between scale, that is, the perception of sheer size (even smallness) in a work of art, and production dimensions in a printed piece, which are very often a function of the budget, the kind of product, the size of press, and other external factors. (And for video, web pages, computer graphics, etc., size is a user-defined parameter.)

The difference between art and design is in the way we look at them.

Design is meant to be looked away from and art to be looked at and into. Design graces our lives with the aesthetic presentation of useful and beneficial things, and art graces us with representations of things to ponder and perceive. Art and design are closely related but nonetheless separate. It is a good thing to keep them straight.

2.   "art Vs. design" by Craig A Elimeliah
January 13, 2006

I have read so many books and articles on design and on art, what it is and how it should be executed. I must admit that since becoming a producer my designing days have taken a backseat to management.

I enjoyed being a designer and now I enjoy working with designers in addition to every other aspect of production. I was at home contemplating what the difference between design and art is, and I think I have come up with some pretty clear lines between the two and have also identified where those lines have become blurred.

Now, it is my understanding that design in the commercial sense is a very calculated and defined process; it is discussed amongst a group and implemented taking careful steps to make sure the objectives of the project are met.

A designer is similar to an engineer in that respect and must not only have an eye for color and style but must adhere to very intricate functional details that will meet the objectives of the project.

The word "design" lends itself to a hint that someone or something has carefully created this "thing" and much planning and thought has been executed to produce the imagery or materials used for the project.

On the other hand, art is something completely separate—any good artist should convey a message or inspire an emotion it doesn't have to adhere to any specific rules, the artist is creating his own rules.

Art is something that can elicit a single thought or feeling such as simplicity or strength, love or pain and the composition simply flows from the hand of the artist. The artist is free to express themselves in any medium and color scheme, using any number of methods to convey their message. No artist ever has to explain why they did something a certain way other than that this is what they felt would best portray the feeling or emotion or message.

Many designers are artists and many artists are designers, the line between the two is complex and intriguing. I was perusing some art books and something strange caught my eye, I had noticed that many of the artists were not creating a unique, almost chaotic portrait of their innermost selves or inspirations rather they were clearly using popular trends to capture the attention of the viewer. I noticed that many of the pieces being shown were "throwbacks" of past artists styles or color and simply refreshed for public consumption.

The very fact that older artists inspire newer artists seems to contradict the whole definition of art. These artists are following a method, a pattern or a standard that has already been established by another artist and therefore they are not creating something completely new rather following instructions laid down by a previous artist rendering that piece to be more design than art. I can completely appreciate the paths laid down by past artists who establish a style or method but at this point it seems that when that style or method is used the art then turns into design. I looked through some older books and saw a rather obvious occurrence in the art being displayed, many of the newer artists were simply copying things from the past.

I admire a person's talent for picking up a brush and creating an image that has an impact on its viewer but when I see it over and over again by different people who are all claiming to be "of the school of...," and that this is legitimate, unique art, I find that a bit hard to swallow. If the artist said, "I have designed something in the standard of Picasso," and this is simply a design based on his style but a new twist has been added, then I would feel more comfortable accepting it for what it is, a design.

But when an artist's style and methods are completely the same as someone else's and even if the message is different I feel that this cannot be passed off as art because the newness and the chaotic nature of it simply flowing from the source seems to be absent and it becomes more like a paint by numbers project than a creation that has never been

seen before. I do not claim to be an expert on defining what art is and what it is not, but I do know that if we look at the differences between art and design we will see a very clear line drawn between the two.

An engineer, if given the exact coordinates to place different colored pixels in specific places, could render a beautiful website or ad simply by following instructions; most design projects have a detailed set of instructions and most design is based on current trends and influences.

An artist, on the other hand, could never be given any specific instructions in creating a new chaotic and unique masterpiece because his emotions and soul is dictating the movement of his hands and the impulses for the usage of the medium.

No art director is going to yell at an artist for producing something completely unique because that is what makes an artist an artist and not a designer.

I feel that designers who are passionate about their work should try and dedicate time to create "art" for art's sake and train themselves to express emotion and feeling through their designs.

Uniqueness comes from passion and not adhering to any rules that may force the artist to make even one stroke that was unintended.

Commercialism has been dictating the course of design and has made a clear and thick line between the artist and the designer. Following trends and applying imagery based on specific needs and goals is the easy part, allowing yourself to express a message or emotion free of any specifications is where true beauty is born.

Designers who are looking for the next big trend or who want to be the one to create that trend must create chaotic and truly original pieces to display their artistic prowess and then apply those unique methods to their design at work, and I think this will create a truly harmonious balance between art and design.