

Defying and Redefining: Reflecting on the Modern Society Through Everyday Objects

2007 – 2008 Integrative Project

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*Artist Statement*

Design allows me to reflect on the surrounding environment. My design process revolves around a series of contemplation, such as reflecting on the nature of mundane objects. It is a way for me to make a better sense out of the reality in which I exist. I find joy in observing various forms of both living and non-living things. The task of designing an object allows myself to become physically involved in the interplay between my conscience and our surrounding environment.

Substantial portion of my work involves bringing two-dimensional plan into a three-dimensional sculptural form. As I go through the conceptualizing and building phases, my conscience constantly leaps across the two worlds of fantasy and reality. This process allows me to blur the boundary between the two seemingly disconnected, yet deeply intertwined worlds.

The project that I am involved in is an exploration of what design means to me. It is a way for me to present my understanding of objects, and their relationship to my own world. I believe that design is not solely about creating convenience and pleasure for people. Design is at its best when it is implemented in products as a way to stimulate our senses and thoughts. With these thoughts in the back of my mind, I have created series of ordinary household items that are functionally deficient. That is, in the traditional sense of how we view designed products. This project is product of my contemplation; it is my voice as a designer that is produced in the form of tangible objects.

### *The Question*

Besides chimps and apes, human is the only known specie that uses tools extensively for its own survival. It is unimaginable for most of us to live through our daily life without the use of man-made tools. Over the years, these manufactured goods have made our life easier. Designers have participated in the effort for making the act of sitting more comfortable and the task of peeling potato skin more effortless using design. The only downside of this progression is that the existence of these objects have become so interwoven within our lifestyle, that people feel ever more helpless without them. So what is the nature of these objects that we happen to adore so much, and feel the necessity to have in our own possession? My contemplation on material culture begins with this simple question. Embarking on a design project that confronts these issues was very important to me.

### *My View of Our Society*

We feel that most of these material objects are a necessary part of our daily survival. Some are not so much important compared to the others, but they are all believed to have significant value in supporting our lifestyle. We love these objects; they provide us with the most gratifying sense of pleasure. Although, when these tools have

become such a great part of our society in serving our need, it is instinctive for people to begin assuming that everything on earth is created for the purpose of our own use. This is reflected in our society's insensitivity against our surrounding environment, led by such activity as digging up oil and cutting down trees. The pleasurable activity that most of us enjoy such as shopping is taking toll on our society. We rapidly consume and discard, only to be left with the feeling of wanting more without knowing why. Our society as a whole has forgotten how to appreciate the things that we already possess. Most of the problems that are prevalent today are there because our society has become more and more isolated from the environment that we are living in.

### *Dada and Surrealism*

My initial idea for this project has began with a pessimistic outlook on the society. The core idea was to deliver this emotion out to the public in a constructive manner. It was difficult directing my source of inspiration through a creative outlet at the initial stage. There was desire to discover a fun and exciting way to draw in my audience to the subject.

Dada and Surrealism came as a source of great inspiration. The two movements are distinct in its time period (Dada movement preceded Surrealism), but the latter movement of the two shared some of the same ideas in which the Dadaism was founded upon.<sup>1</sup> The Dada movement in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was stimulated by the social and political events that were happening at the time. It protested against the mechanization of the society, which played a great role in the modernized warfare during World War I.<sup>2</sup> In turn, the Surrealists were the ones to make a practical use out of this social protest by bringing about social and psychological change to every aspect of existence.<sup>3</sup> In this change, the idea of dreams and imaginations played a powerful role in the artists' works. The problems that these artists saw are fairly similar to the failure of

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<sup>1</sup> Klingsohr-Leroy, Cathrin. Surrealism. 2006. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Elger, Dietmar. Dadaism. Taschen, 2006. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Klingsohr-Leroy, Cathrin. Surrealism. 2006. 7.

the society that we are witnessing today. The war in the Middle East as a leading example, war persists everywhere around the world. Machines and industries are controlling our lives, and putting our survival on this planet in jeopardy. Through study of two movements, it became obvious that our society's struggle against industrialization, nature, and morality has been putting profound effect on the humanity way before our generation.

There was immense amount of possibilities in incorporating the playful nature of Dada and Surrealism into my own work. The former of the two movements particularly suited my need. Dada movement, which was labeled as being anti-art and childish in the manner which they composed and presented their works to the world. My mind was drawn to the idea of using their strategy within my current work because of its ability to stimulate the audience. Historically, the creation of Dada artists was important in transforming the way people created art in the rest of the twentieth century. They did not resort to the conventional way of making and thinking about art. These artworks allowed the audience to become part of the process in which the meaning of the works was revealed to both sides when it became part of the public. The way in which the world reacted to Dada artists helped them uphold their presence in the society.<sup>4</sup> The Most importantly, the significance of their works came from the way they transformed how people thought about themselves and the world outside of them.

### *My Work and Dada*

It is true that my work will never come close to anything we call Dada or Surrealism. Their works were made in a specific time period with a specific social context. It would be virtually impossible to bring out the same kind of curiosity from the public and fury from the critics like the way Marcel Duchamp was able to do with his “ready-made” works.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Elger, Dietmar. Dadaism. Taschen, 2006. 7.

<sup>5</sup> L'Ecotais, Emmanuelle de. The Dada Spirit, Assouline. 2002. 11.

The pieces that are presented in the proceeding section are taking another angle from what the Dada artists followed. They are about questioning the unquestionable spectrum of life; it is an attempt to reveal the unexposed from what is normally accepted as a conventional knowledge. More specifically, I am exploring the entity of products, and the role that they play within our modern society.

### *Product 1: Music Stand*

I have created a music stand that cannot hold a piece of music. This work questions the function of design, which is meant to bring betterment to the people. Design should benefit us by improving the quality of people's life. Although, there have been more than a few cases where design has been exploited in our society. In our capitalist economy, design is being used as a tool to reproduce more products for consumption. Only way to prevent this cycle was to design products that resist the control of people. The initial goal was to make a product that can reject the sense of ownership through its inability to function in a conventional manner.

The body of the music stand was designed to mimic a living creature. Its form is designed to stand in an erect and confident manner, demonstrating its independence from the human control. The overall structure also has an organic aesthetic that possess a spiritual quality within. A void in the music stand was created to not allow a sheet of music to sit on it. This demonstrates its ultimate resistance from man and their desire to rule.

### *Product 2: Flatware*

This particular flatware is not useful at any means. The fork looks like a fork, but it is not a fork. The spoon looks like a spoon, but it is not a spoon. The hollow flatware is inspired by paintings of Rene Magritte, in which he explored the relationship between word and image.

These utensils are constructed to convey sense of illusion. The flatware is completely useless as a tool. The outline of generic flatware was used as a model to design these forms. The series of silhouettes; fork, teaspoon, and knife, are used as a way to suggest its function. Again, this series of hollow flatware is product that is free from the restraint of our society. It questions the condition in which we live, and how we have grown to separate ourselves from the essence of life, so-called inconvenience, through assistance of these tools. The uselessness of the flatware, and its inside-out form speaks of the aspects of our lives that we either alienate from or fail to acknowledge.

### *Product 3: Lamp*

Lamp is a mundane object, which lacks significance by observing our modern living standards. Nowadays our rooms can be lit brightly with the flick of a light switch, as long as we have paid the electric bill. This type of condition in which we live is making people indifferent to nature; making us forget how to appreciate the things that are offered through our natural environment. Hence, a lamp is a symbol of the humanity's progress and also a mark of their failure. It signifies humanities' lack of respect to what where we have come from.

The wooden lamp demonstrates the inconvenience that we are not used to dealing with in the modern time. The light bulb is placed within the solid wooden structure, thus it is unable to emit as much light as it normally can. The only light that escapes the structure is through small holes that are placed underneath the lampshade structure. This particular lamp is not meant to light the room. Instead, it celebrates the time when the power of light was beyond our control.

### *Product 4: Chair*

Chairs have been occupying the imaginations of designers around the world for a long period of time. Chair serves as a place for us to rest and contemplate. The act of

sitting in a chair is what makes us human. It is also a way to alienate ourselves from the environment in which we live. Chair is what allows us to deny the rules that are imposed upon every other creature that reside on this planet. With the assistance of this object, we are given the miraculous ability to maintain upright posture while avoiding direct contact with the ground with very little physical strength. Chair symbolizes humanity's ego. It physically lifts us above all others, while making us feel as if though we hold the greatest importance in the world.

My design differs from the normal chairs that we are used to sit in; it can barely support any weight at all. This chair contains very little structural mass, designed to collapse with the slightest application of force. It is not an object that allows us to uplift away from the rest of the world. Instead, it takes us back to the ground level where we can share a common living experience with the other life forms on earth. Thus, the form and function of the chair illustrates the fragility of the constructed reality in which humanity dreams to be in.

### *My Works in the Context of Our Society*

My series of products are not necessarily about answering problem that our society face with, nor it is simply a direct criticism of mankind. Instead, this project is posing questions to the audience. I am hoping that my series of products will facilitate a dialogue between our minds and these objects to reflect on our society. At the end, I believe that people can make a personal connection with these products through their own unique visual and physical exploration.

There is a quote by Albert Einstein that said, "The most important thing is not to stop questioning." It is critical for all of us to come into our own understanding of the world that we live in. Sometimes, it is easy for most of us to accept things just the way they are. We have been taught through our whole life about our planet, our life, and our society as if those things are proven facts. The things we consider reasonable are not necessarily reasonable. The things we consider real are not necessarily real. Presumption can be deadly, for it will only allow us to follow the path that somebody has paved for us.



As a freethinking member of this society, it is the responsibility of each one of us to come into grip with the reality in our own terms.

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