Experimental Jetset
Interview with Lucienne Roberts//2005

01. Education and inspiration

All three of us studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam. Marieke [Stolk] and Danny [van Dungen] graduated in 1997; Erwin [Brinkers], who was in another year, graduated in 1998. At that time, Linda Van Deursen was definitely a very influential person; she was one of our favourite teachers. She still is very inspirational to us.

The artist Richard Prince also had a huge impact on us. We were introduced to his work through Linda. We especially liked his 'joke paintings'. We remember that seeing these paintings, displaying a few simple sentences in Helvetica, was really a breath of fresh air in a time when graphic design was more about layered compositions, techno- and grunge-typography, and clogged lay-outs.

Prince's work (not only his 'joke paintings', but also his 'gangs', his grouped photographs) showed that it was possible to analyse/deconstruct pop-culture, but without the 'deconstructivist' aesthetics so fashionable in graphic design around that time, and that we disliked so much. His work had a hard and cool 'punk-minimalist' sensibility that we responded to. (Some people assume our work to be heavily influenced by Swiss late-modernists such as Josef Muller-Brockmann and designers like that, but actually we only learned about these designers quite recently. Richard Prince had a much greater influence.)

We were also inspired by Bob Gill. In the library of the Rietveld Academy we discovered a dusty copy of *Forget All The Rules You Ever Learned About Graphic Design – Including the Ones in This Book*. Gill's work had an immediate impact. What impressed us most was his consistent use of the 'problem/solution' model. It's a dialectical model that some might find outdated, rigid, one-dimensional, didactic, archaic. To us, the problem/solution model is beautiful. Of course, it has a tragic side, as every solution only brings forth more problems (and besides, we all know there is no such thing as one perfect solution). But it is exactly this inherent tragic side which makes this model so beautiful and useful to us.

Last but not least, there is Wim Crouwel. What interested us most is the fact that, in his work, form and approach are the same. There's an idiosyncratic quality in his designs: his work is highly systematic but highly personal, organized according to his own logic. From the smallest logo to his body of work as a whole, his pieces are systematic worlds in themselves.

To be confronted with such systematic work is quite powerful; it's ecstatic and disturbing at the same time. To feel your own logic clash with another logic, to be suddenly drawn into another rhythm, another rationality, a different set of rules: it's a profound experience, causing you to see the world with different eyes. Crouwel's work can certainly trigger experiences like that. (It is often thought that design, to have a subversive potential, has to be unexpected, irrational, rebellious; anything as long as it's not 'boring'. We very much disagree: in our view, it is consistency, and an iron logic, that can really throw you off your feet, and change your way of thinking.)

02. Modernism and functionalism

Whether we consider ourselves modernists or not is an impossible question. The answer would depend completely on the definition of Modernism one employs.

For example, there's the idea of Modernism as a very defined, historical classification, starting, let's say, in the 1850s, peaking around 1910, and rapidly fading away after that. That's quite a feasible definition.

Another definition would be the more 'Habermasian' idea of Modernism, as something yet to be fulfilled, linked to the notion of modernity as a project that started with the Enlightenment. That's also a very plausible definition.

In between these two definitions, there are hundreds of others. And since we are torn between all of them, it's quite difficult for us to answer this question.

What we do know though is that we aren't functionalists (in the common use of the word), as we aren't just interested in the 'narrow' definition of the word 'function'. To us, a chair isn't simply something to just sit on; it also functions as the embodiment of a certain way of thinking. This 'broad' definition of function is actually closer to early than to late modernism.

To give a simple example of this, in the brilliant *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, Reyner Banham shows that Rietveld's arm-chair is in fact a highly symbolic structure. The design of the chair cannot be simply justified as being 'functional'; the chair is also a statement about the infinity of space. This is something we're quite interested in: the function of design as an embodiment of ideology.

03. Aesthetics and utopia

We are firm believers in the utopian dimension of design. It's something we're absolutely convinced of. It's our main drive. But we aren't sure if this utopian dimension can be found in utilitarianism, or social messages. Those particular forms of engagement can be strong sources of inspiration for the designer, and in that sense they certainly play an important role, but they often lack a real dialectical potential. In our view, a true utopian design should change people's way of thinking, not just their opinions.

If we are indeed living in a fragmented society (and we believe we are) then

perhaps the only way to shock us out of this alienation is to counter the fragmentation of society with the wholeness of design. In that sense, the utopian dimension is to be found in the internal organisation of the designed object, its inner logic. Which brings us back to the idiosyncratic quality of Crouwel's work mentioned earlier, or the example of Rietveld's chair as an embodiment of ideology. You can define it in many different ways: Herbert Marcuse speaks of 'the aesthetic dimension' (in a very good essay of the same name), you can also refer to it as the dialectical dimension, or the critical dimension, or the inner logic, or the internal whole. In our view, these are all names for the same thing.

We recently stumbled across a quote by the artist John McCracken, who said 'I've always felt that it was possible that a piece could change or transform reality, or the world. A work being so tuned that it somehow alters the constitution of things.' This almost musical idea of 'tuning' is precisely where we locate the utopian potential of design. (We know this probably sounds hopelessly idealistic, but that's exactly what we are).

To elaborate on this last remark, we see the work of minimal artists such as McCracken and Donald Judd as profoundly political. The modularity in the work of Judd is especially subversive. Modularity, which is the repetition of standard units, always seems to point towards the idea of infinity; after all, repetition is a phenomenon that suggests a movement 'ad infinitum'. And in our view, it is exactly this idea of infinity that has the potential to shock us out of the alienation of the everyday. It is no wonder that some of the most radical artworks share this sense of infinity, and therefore possess the subversive potential to let us see the world in a different way.

Interestingly enough, we think it is precisely his modularity (and not necessarily his attempts to produce furniture) that caused Judd to touch the world of design. To put it boldly, we think that design, intrinsically linked to diverse processes of repetition (serial production, graphic multiplication, etc.), is closely related to the modularity of minimal art.

04. Advil and Excedrin

Graphic design is enormously important to us. It occupies every minute of our lives. We have to admit that every single thing that we do, even when seemingly unrelated to graphic design, we immediately try to place in the context of graphic design. Watching a documentary on TV, listening to pop music, taking a walk, going to a rock show, teaching, hanging out with friends, even sleeping: it all becomes part of the design process.

Recently, we wrote a short text for UK graphic design magazine *Grafik*, to answer their question '2004: How was it for you?'. In that text, we wrote that 'since we started in 1997, the usual rhythm of weeks, months and years

gradually disappeared. We're now marching to the beat of deadline after deadline. The only constants are the daily pressure to perform, and a steady diet of Advil 400 (against common headache), Excedrin (against tension headache) and Maxalt (against migraine).' [...] But we still think it is worth it. We're living a world that seems dominated by postmodern tendencies (movements such as neo-conservatism, right-wing populism and religious fundamentalism). Working in graphic design, a discipline born out of modernism, gives us the chance to explore values and themes that we can't find anywhere else. For us, there is a lot of consolation to be found in graphic design. In our opinion, 'the only way to shock us out of this alienation is to counter the fragmentation of society with the wholeness of design'. This is not just a rhetoric statement; for us this is quite personal. The practice of graphic design is also a way to shock us out of our own alienation.

05. Design and art

We don't see graphic design as art, but we do see art as a form of design. Although it's hard to define art, it's not difficult to define its context: there exists a clear infrastructure of exhibition spaces, galleries, museums, art magazines, art publishers, art history, theory, etc. Art can be seen as the production of objects, concepts and activities intended to function within this specific infrastructure. In our view, this production can certainly be seen as a specific form of design.

Speaking about art and design, it's interesting to see how the view on the relationship between art and design changed during the course of modernism. Striving towards a synthesis of art and design was quite an elementary characteristic of early modernism, quite possibly its most defining one. Early modernists such as László Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitzky were absolutely driven by the idea to unite art and the everyday; the idea of art, not as an added, decorative layer, but as something fully integrated in modern life. While late-modernists, such as Crouwel and the late Rietveld (as opposed to the early Rietveld) were (and in the case of Crouwel, still are) radically against such a synthesis of art and design.

In the conclusion of 'Theory and Design in the First Machine Age', Banham seems to suggest that the late modernists more or less sacrificed the early-modernist ideal of synthesis in favour of late-modernist matters such as functionalism and utilitarianism. Which is an interesting thought to say the least. In our view, there is certainly a necessity to restore the historical, modernist link between design and art.

Experimental Jetset, 'Interview with Lucienne Roberts', *Drip-dry Shirts: The Evolution of the Graphic Designer*, ed. Lucienne Roberts (Lausanne: AVA, 2005); revised version, 2007.

Paul Rand
Politics of Design//1981

It is no secret that the real world in which the designer functions is not the world of art, but the world of buying and selling. For sales, and not design, are the *raison d'être* of any business organization. Unlike the salesman, however, the designer's overriding motivation is art: art in the service of business, art that enhances the quality of life and deepens appreciation of the familiar world.

Design is a problem-solving activity. It provides a means of clarifying, synthesizing and dramatizing a word, a picture, a product or an event. A serious barrier to the realization of good design, however, are the layers of management inherent in any bureaucratic structure. For aside from sheer prejudice or simple unawareness, one is apt to encounter such absurdities as second-guessing, kow-towing, posturing, nit-picking and jockeying for position, let alone such buck-passing institutions as the committee meeting and the task force. At issue, it seems, is neither malevolence nor stupidity, but human frailty.

The smooth functioning of the design process may be thwarted in other ways: by the imperceptive executive, who in matters of design understands neither his proper role nor that of the designer; by the eager but cautious advertising man whose principal concern is pleasing his client; and by the insecure client who depends on informal office surveys and pseudo-scientific research to deal with questions that are unanswerable and answers that are questionable.

Unless the design function in a business bureaucracy is so structured that direct access to the ultimate decision-maker is possible, trying to produce good work is very often an exercise in futility. Ignorance of the history and methodology of design – how work is conceived, produced and reproduced – adds to the difficulties and misunderstandings. Design is a way of life, a point of view. It involves the whole complex of visual communication: talent, creative ability, manual skill and technical knowledge. Aesthetics and economics, technology and psychology are intrinsically related to the process.

One of the more common problems which tends to create doubt and confusion is caused by the inexperienced and anxious executive who innocently expects, or even demands, to see not one but many solutions to a problem. These may include a number of visual and/or verbal concepts, an assortment of layouts, a variety of pictures and colour schemes, as well as a choice of type styles. He needs the reassurance of numbers and the opportunity to exercise his personal preferences. He is also most likely to be the one to insist on endless revisions with unrealistic deadlines, adding to an already wasteful and time-consuming ritual. Theoretically, a great number of ideas assures a great number of choices, but such choices are essentially quantitative. This practice is as bewildering as it is wasteful. It discourages spontaneity, encourages indifference, and more often than not produces results which are neither distinguished, interesting, nor effective. In short, good ideas rarely come in bunches.

The designer who voluntarily presents his client with a batch of layouts does so not out of prolificacy, but out of uncertainty or fear. He thus encourages the client to assume the role of referee. In the event of genuine need, however, the skilful designer is able to produce a reasonable number of good ideas. But quantity by demand is quite different from quantity by choice. Design is a time-consuming occupation. Whatever his working habits, the designer fills many a wastebasket in order to produce one good idea. Advertising agencies can be especially guilty in this numbers game. Bent on impressing the client with their ardour, they present a welter of layouts, many of which are superficial interpretations of potentially good ideas, or slick renderings of trite ones.

Frequent job reassignments within an active business are additional impediments about which management is often unaware. Persons unqualified to make design judgments are frequently shifted into design-sensitive positions. The position of authority is then used as evidence of expertise. While most people will graciously accept and appreciate criticism when it comes from a knowledgeable source, they will resent it (openly or otherwise) when it derives solely from a power position, even though the manager may be highly intelligent or have self-professed 'good taste'. At issue is not the right, or even the duty, to question, but the right to make design judgment. Such misuse of privilege is a disservice to management and counterproductive to good design. Expertise in business administration, journalism, accounting or selling, though necessary in its place, is not expertise in problems dealing with visual appearance. The salesman who can sell you the most sophisticated computer typesetting equipment is rarely one who appreciates fine typography or elegant proportions. Actually, the plethora of bad design that we see all around us can probably be attributed as much to good salesmanship as to bad taste.

Deeply concerned with every aspect of the production process, the designer must often contend with inexperienced production personnel and time-consuming purchasing procedures, which stifle enthusiasm, instinct and creativity. Though peripherally involved in making aesthetic judgments (choosing printers, papermakers, typesetters and other suppliers), purchasing agents are for the most part ignorant of design practices, insensitive to subtleties that mean quality, and unaware of marketing needs. Primarily and rightly concerned with cost-cutting, they mistakenly equate elegance with extravagance and parsimony with wise business judgment.

These problems are by no means confined to the bureaucratic corporation. Artists, writers and others in the fields of communication and visual arts, in government or private industry, in schools or churches, must constantly cope with those who do not understand and are therefore unsympathetic to their ideas. The designer is especially vulnerable because design is grist for anybody's mill. 'I know what I like' is all the authority one needs to support one's critical aspirations.

Like the businessman, the designer is amply supplied with his own frailties. But unlike him, he is often inarticulate, a serious problem in an area in which semantic difficulties so often arise. This is more pertinent in graphic design than in the industrial design or architectural fields, because graphic design is more open to aesthetic than to functional preferences.

Stubbornness may be one of the designer's admirable or notorious qualities (depending on one's point of view) – a principled refusal to compromise, or a means of camouflaging inadequacy. Design clichés, meaningless patterns, stylish illustrations and predetermined solutions are signs of such weakness. An understanding of the significance of modernism and familiarity with the history of design, painting, architecture and other disciplines, which distinguish the educated designer and make his role more meaningful, are not every designer's strong points.

The designer, however, needs all the support he can muster, for his is a unique but unenviable position. His work is subject to every imaginable interpretation and to every piddling piece of fault-finding. Ironically, he seeks not only the applause of the connoisseur, but the approbation of the crowd.

A salutary working relationship is not only possible but essential. Designers are not always intransigent, nor are all purchasing agents blind to quality. Many responsible advertising agencies are not unaware of the role that design plays as a communication force. As for the person who pays the piper, the businessman who is sympathetic and understanding is not altogether illusory. He is professional, objective and alert to new ideas. He places responsibility where it belongs and does not feel insecure enough to see himself as an expert in a field other than his own. He is, moreover, able to provide a harmonious environment in which goodwill, understanding, spontaneity and mutual trust – qualities so essential to the accomplishment of creative work – may flourish.

Similarly, the skilled graphic designer is a professional whose world is divided between lyricism and pragmatism. He is able to distinguish between trendiness and innovation, between obscurity and originality. He uses freedom of expression not as licence for abstruse ideas, and tenacity not as bullheadedness but as evidence of his own convictions. His is an independent spirit guided more by an 'inner artistic standard of excellence'[1] than by some external influence. At the same time as he realizes that good design must withstand the rigours of the marketplace, he believes that without good design the marketplace is a showcase of visual vulgarity.

The creative arts have always laboured under adverse conditions. Subjectivity, emotion and opinion seem to be concomitants of artistic questions. The layman feels insecure and awkward about making design judgments, even though he pretends to make them with a certain measure of know-how. But, like it or not, business conditions compel many to get inextricably involved with problems in which design plays some role.

For the most part, the creation or the effects of design, unlike science, are neither measurable nor predictable, nor are the results necessarily repeatable. If there is any assurance, besides faith, a businessman can have, it is in choosing talented, competent and experienced designers.

Meaningful design, design of quality and wit, is no small achievement, even in an environment in which good design is understood, appreciated and ardently accepted, and in which profit is not the only motive. At best, work that has any claim to distinction is the exception, even under the most ideal circumstances. After all, our epoch can boast of only one A.M. Cassandre.[2]

1 Anthony Storr, *The Dynamics of Creation* (New York, 1972) 189.

2 [Adolphe Mouron Cassandre (1901–68), the Ukrainian-French painter, commercial poster artist and typeface designer, best known for his poster *Normandie*, and the Yves Saint-Laurent logo.]

Paul Rand, 'Politics of Design', *Graphis Annual, 1981* (Zurich: Graphis Press: 1981) 233–5.

Rick Poynor
Art's Little Brother//2005

Designers have always had an inferiority complex when it comes to their relationship with artists and art. It isn't usually talked about in quite such bald terms – no one wants to admit to weakness – but that's what it is. It doesn't matter that design is playing a bigger role in culture than ever or that some argue that it has become the more significant activity. Old ways of thinking persist and the balance of power seems to stay much the same.

Designers rarely achieve the level of recognition and financial reward attained by the most successful artists. Media coverage of art and design constantly reinforces art's privileged position. While every paper has an art critic knocking out weekly reviews of new exhibitions for the arts and culture pages, design is still not seen as a subject fit for serious discussion. It's treated as a lifestyle issue and skimpy, superficial write-ups concentrate on showcasing enviable domestic interiors and things you can buy for the home. Design books and exhibitions tend to be ignored. If you ask editors why, they say it's because, 'historically, we haven't reviewed design' – as though it was written in stone.

Yet questions about design and art's relationship, their similarities and differences, and the ways they might now be converging, refuse to go away. People on both sides of the divide have a stake in the matter. Some artists are fascinated by design's role in contemporary society and commerce; they make art about it and create designs of their own. Some designers are increasingly inclined to use their creations as a vehicle for the kinds of personal expression and commentary that are usually seen as art's preserve. 'As we move forward through the twenty-first century', notes Barbara Bloemink, curatorial director at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York, 'distinctions between design and art are likely to become increasingly difficult to define.'

Ironic, then, that Bloemink's recent exhibition, 'Design ≠ Art', unwittingly reinforced the old imbalance. It's perfectly true, as she notes in the catalogue, that 'the current ascendance of design gives renewed relevance to questions concerning the validity of art's conventionally privileged position.' So what was the museum trying to say with the mysterious mathematical symbol in the title, which means 'not equal to, but not greater than and not less than'? The Cooper-Hewitt is a design museum, yet only works by artists acting as designers featured in the exhibition: figures such as Donald Judd, Scott Burton, James Turrell and Jorge Pardo. Visitors had no opportunity to compare artists' designs with designers' treatments of similar objects and no examples of designers producing more art-like forms of design were shown.

A new study of the phenomenon of 'design art' from Tate Publishing by art critic Alex Coles is similarly one-sided. *DesignArt* examines the way that artists such as Henri Matisse, Sonia Delaunay, Judd and Pardo have dealt with pattern, furniture, interiors and architecture. 'A key issue to keep in mind while thinking through designart is that all art is designed even if it endeavours to appear otherwise', writes Coles. He hopes to encourage 'a more flexible approach towards design' and who could argue with that? But the way he goes about it, whatever the benefits might be for artists, only ends up confirming that art remains the dominant term in the relationship. Coles' exclusion of designers producing anything resembling art could not be more pointed; artists are permitted to undertake forays into design to refresh and extend art but it appears to be a one-way street since no one is travelling in the other direction. The established positions of art and design in the cultural hierarchy go unchallenged.

It's worth remembering at this point how designers have tended to view the question of what distinguishes design from art. One of the best accounts is the chapter 'Is a Designer an Artist?' in Norman Potter's classic *What is a Designer*. The answer for Potter is clearly no. A designer, unlike an artist, 'works through and for other people, and is concerned primarily with their problems rather than his own'. A painter's first responsibility, on the other hand, 'is to the truth of his own vision'. This is the contrast usually made between the roles of designer and artist; the designer must deal with matters of practicality and function while artists are free to do what they like in pursuit of their self-chosen goals.

A key idea for Potter is that the essence of a designer's work, as a planner, problem solver and supervisor, is to supply clear instructions so that others can complete the production of the design. By contrast, a painter or sculptor is more dependent on feedback from hand and eye and develops the work through direct experience of the materials. Potter suggests that the designer will need to be capable of more detachment than may be necessary to a fine artist.

But it's rarely as straightforward as this makes it sound. There are more passionate, less detached designers just as there are highly cerebral artists.

Like designers, many artists make work with photography, video and computers. Artists are often dependent on specialist manufacturing techniques to fabricate their pieces and installations and they need to give those who assist them accurate instructions. Meanwhile, the computer has transferred specialized tasks and crafts once carried out by others to the designer's desktop and control, eliminating the need to prepare detailed instructions. This is particularly the case in graphic design and typography. Using digital tools, design work can proceed in a more exploratory, open-ended way and this might be compared to the intuitive shaping by hand of old-fashioned art materials.

So we come back to the essential split between function and vision. Donald Judd insisted on the difference between his art and his design work, which he kept hidden from public view for many years. In 1993, he explained why: 'The configuration and the scale of art cannot be transposed into furniture and architecture. The intent of art is different from that of the latter, which must be functional. If a chair or a building is not functional, if it appears to be only art, it is ridiculous. The art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness and scale as a chair ... A work of art exists as itself: a chair exists as a chair itself. And the idea of a chair isn't a chair.'

Judd had good reason to preserve the distinction. The worst accusation that could be levelled at abstract art was that it was 'decorative'. In 1967, art critic Clement Greenberg attacked the new minimalist art, saying that it was 'closer to furniture than art' and comparing it, with an audible sneer, to 'good design' executed by someone else rather than made by the artist's own hand. The obvious danger, if Judd's furniture started to gain attention, was that his art would be demoted to the same level.

But Judd hadn't so much resolved the issue as dodged it. Coles jokes that his 'stack sculptures would make sublime shelving units and the floor sculptures comfortable stools'. Others claim that Judd's furniture fails as furniture and must be art, after all, because it isn't comfortable to sit on and flunks the design equals function test. The art or design question comes up again in art critic Matthew Collings' long interview with Ron Arad in Arad's latest monograph. Judd owned a Rietveld chair, displayed at his home in Marfa, Texas, among his own pieces. What would happen, Collings and Arad wonder, if you were to take a Rietveld chair and a Judd chair to Covent Garden and show them to a passers-by? 'If you tell them which is art and which is design', says Arad, 'they'll think you're having them on – they'll think, why the distinction?'

Why indeed? There are few better examples of the way in which ideas about design have been enlarged in the last two decades than the work of Arad, an obvious candidate for inclusion in any exhibition or book about 'design art'. In 1987, Arad participated in Documenta 8, devoted to art and design, in Kassel, Germany – the hoped-for interdisciplinary meeting of minds failed to happen – and, the same year, he was one of the first designers in London to venture into art's territory with an exhibition at the Edward Totah Gallery. He created chairs – as well as concrete hi-fis and telescopic aerial lights – that were functional in their way, but also concerned with what Judd called the 'idea of the chair'. At the time, design critic Deyan Sudjic went so far as to propose that Arad be viewed as an artist whose subject matter was design. His work dealt not only with the qualities of a chair that are to do with sitting, but with its symbolic, allusive and literary dimension.

Arad was one of many designers who, in the 1980s, tried to endow his designs with an extra layer of meaning, but with such little discussion of design as a cultural activity, wider critical awareness of design's enhanced potential has been slow to develop. In his conversation with Arad, Collings says he feels that he knows when something is more a piece of design than art, but that he is 'completely naïve' about what design is and about its history. He is embarrassed, he admits, by his ignorance. Offering his own version of the familiar riff, Collings suggests that the essential difference between design and art is that design has function while art has mystery, yet he acknowledges that 'the art world's mystery often isn't all that mysterious any more'. He is absolutely right there. Art's routines are often obvious, repetitious and stale.

The point about Arad, though, was that his work did possess a sense of mystery. His One Off display space in Shelton Street, London was a cave of billowing steel sheets that couldn't have looked less like a sleek furniture showroom. There are many examples of designs that exceed their functional role and take on some of the qualities associated with art; Charles and Ray Eames' LaChaise lounger; Shiro Kuramata's How High the Moon metal-mesh armchair; Daniel Weil's deconstructed radios in plastic bags; Dunne & Raby's Globally Positioned Table, which responds to the influence of electromagnetic radiation. The mystery comes from the way that our expectations of form's conventional possibilities and limits are overturned. The sensory, intellectual and emotional satisfactions they offer as pieces to look at, think about and react to – as well as to use – are akin to the experience of sculpture.

Hella Jongerius is another designer who regularly blurs the distinction between design and art. 'If, as a designer, you don't grab the theme by the throat and probe it to its farthest consequences, you're inevitably going to get stuck at the outer surface', she says in a recent monograph. 'In the long run it's a dead end. I believe we make a mistake if we restrict ourselves to pragmatic aspects.' An interviewer suggests that she might be in the wrong profession and that designers should perhaps leave the other side of the story to art. 'Usable objects have their story too', insists Jongerius. 'Still, does it really matter all that much? Who cares if it's art or if it's design?'

There is a tendency, when design ventures too close to art, to say that it has ceased to be design and become art instead. Designers have often been the first to criticise colleagues deemed to have crossed the line. Some show a deep distaste for what they see as gratuitous self-expression and they make these complaints even when a design has satisfied functional requirements. What these criticisms reveal is often no more than a preference for a particular design aesthetic in which traces of the designer's hand are kept to a minimum. The unapologetic embrace of decorative motifs in Tord Boontje's work is a deliberate

rejection of the cold, machine-like, modernist-derived design language of many industrial products and objects. Far from being something to be shunned, uninhibited decoration is now seen by some designers as a way of re-humanizing design.

Stephen Bayley has always insisted that industrial design is the real visual art of the twentieth century. This was good showmanship, but reversing art and design's position so decisively is not plausible at this point even if you suspect that history might one day share his opinion. The aim is not to pull art down. Nor is it to crown design as the new art. But it is certainly to elevate design. Art and design exist in a continuum of possibilities, and rigid definitions that might make sense on paper are not tenable in practice when both activities can take so many forms. The most interesting work often happens in the gaps where there is room for manoeuvre and scope for debate.

Dunne & Raby are a good example of why we need to approach the relationship of art and design more flexibly. They are emphatic that they don't wish to be seen as artists. They recognise that it is in the context of design, perceived as designers, that their speculative research could have most impact. If their self-initiated projects were to be classified as art and shown only in galleries, their work would be seen as a kind artistic fantasy and would be ignored by the companies, institutions and policy-makers they would most like to influence. All kinds of opportunities will open up if only we can enlarge our notion of what design practice might be to embrace new kinds of design thinking and research.

If design really is in the ascendant, it is perhaps for the most fundamental of reasons. Since the 1960s, art has become increasingly suspicious of forms of expression that are merely visual. Artists saw beauty as simple-minded. They regarded design and decoration, which still cared about aesthetics, as superficial and vacuous. The artist's role was to go deeper, to be a visual thinker, to deal in ideas. Duchamp's legacy, conceptual art, has become a catch-all and art based on the sketchiest of thoughts is routinely desribed today in these terms. A visit to MoMA's new galleries reveals what art has lost in the process. The early twentieth-century floor, showing masterpieces of post-impressionism, cubism, fauvism, expressionism, suprematism and surrealism, is an inexhaustible banquet of visual stimulation and pleasure. MoMA's work from after the Second World War is a lot bigger, but also thinner. Its overblown gestures can often be absorbed in moments. There is much less to savour and study and consequently, in both aesthetic and intellectual senses, rather less reward.

Design has no such hang-ups about the beauty of visual form. It exults in it. Artists may resist beauty because it is too easy, too compliant or insufficiently critical, but this does not change the fact that people hunger for it. We seek

retinal pleasure, things to run our eyes over, colours lines, textures and shapes to explore and inhabit, and design has no hesitation in supplying these experiences. Design is becoming more elaborately layered, more spectacular, more pervasive in our lives. Design, rather than art, is foremost now in embodying the visual spirit of the age. Millions get by without going anywhere near an art gallery, but everyone is touched in some way by design. Perhaps what we are seeing in the inexorable rise of design is the gradual reunification of art, in the pre-modernist, 'decorative' sense, and everyday life. If art is so important to our social, mental and spiritual well-being, why should we keep them apart?

In their books, both Bloemink and Coles quote Matisse's famous statement: 'What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art that could be for every mental worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue.'

Matisse's sentiment, recorded almost a century ago, could not be more contemporary, though the stresses of modern living that he wants to heal with art 'like a good armchair' are more intense than he could have guessed. He describes his hopes for painting, but he could just as well be talking about design's comforting sensorial embrace. 'Design art' is an awkward compound term and may not catch on,, but at least it suggests the continuity between design and art. Neither word on its own seems fully adequate any longer to explain how our visual culture is evolving. To move forward, we need a wider public understanding that design is a means of personal and cultural expression with the potential to equal and even exceed art's reach. It's high time the media stopped treating design as nothing more than a pleasant diversion and woke up to this. If *The Guardian*, for instance, can devote an entire issue of its daily review to a 17-page article on the painter Caravaggio, it can certainly find space to think more seriously about design.

Rick Poynor, 'Art's Little Brother', *Icon*, no. 23 (London, May 2005).