

The ornaments

By André Ricard

An incitement to reconsider the role of the ornament on design works.

Adding some decoration to the functional objects is a matter that the principles of the modern movement clearly rejected. According to them, useful things do not need decorative elements: it is enough with the form. From that masterful statement, design does not aim to decorate an object. In effect, on the design field, a product can be undervalued just for its decoration, even when its form has significant functional qualities.

Design magazines and exhibitions never show a decorated product; that disqualifies them without more consideration. Even if its design is excellent and the ornament is discreet, even beautiful, none of them is exhibited nor rewarded. The spontaneous reaction is always “what a pity it has this decoration”; it seems like a simple print deprives it from the other qualities.

This essential principle, that many of us have shared, deserves to be reconsidered today. It holds an overtaken aesthetic totalitarianism. A style that the design tastemakers impose to a public they consider aesthetically ignorant. The rule of not sullyng design works with decorations has been imposed. The ones that show some ornaments are seen with certain discredit. However, this austere view has not arrived to impose itself on real world. What the social response shows is that a big part of the public, the majority, keeps on preferring decorated products. It is a verified fact that no matter how white, immaculate and gorgeous a flatware set is; the 80% of the sold flatware sets have decoration. They could be made with fine porcelain, chinaware or glass, but they will all have some graphology that adorns them. We should then recognize that preferring a restrained object, with no ornaments, keeps on being a minority trend that does not even defined a specific class. The taste for ornaments is really classless. The style and quality of the materials could change but this trend for the ornament is found in all society levels.

There exist then an unattended desire among the public. Is it really that aberrant to decorate a properly designed product? As long as an ornament does not interfere on the efficacy of the function, what could be the argument employed to disqualify it?

Staunchly maintaining this veto to the ornament shows that rationalism not only looks after the functionality of things, but it is also a style. A strict style with a puritanical look. A monastic aesthetic that rejects the decorations for subjective reasons, not for rational ones. Is this truly compatible with the objective statements of the own rationalism? And even more when we see how that that refuses the added decoration is supplied with the ruses of the features we give to the form with chamfers, blunts, grooves and different textures wisely distributed on the surface. These resources are a kind of integrated ornaments of which projected shadow “decorates” in a subtle way the best designs without being branded as

decorativism.

If in a certain epoch, after years and centuries of decorative excess, the creative austerity that rationalism proposed was justified as a return to the functional essence of things, maybe now we should reconsider if it would not be fair to open contemporary design to the prudent ornament for meeting the demand that people require as identity or different means of expression. If design does not deal with this demand, it will be attended as it has been done until now anyway. What we reject accepting does not stop existing and we should ask ourselves if it would not be better to control the situation instead of ignoring it.

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